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ABSTRACT

An action research project was designed to test a model for providing integrated guidance and assessment services to adult women in Britain. A network of professional guidance providers were involved in delivering the services. Coordination was separate from delivery but linked into the action research and evaluation. The emphasis throughout remained on rapid response to expressed client need. In total, 105 women in the Norfolk and Waveney area used 277 units of service. The model was based on a capacity to mix and match services from a menu of guidance and assessment options. Methods used were case studies, ongoing monitoring of management information systems, tracking of all women and employers who contacted the project, collection of background data on all women using the project, and telephone surveys of samples of nonparticipants and participants. A significant finding was the evidence that these women did not know about guidance services. Very few had heard of any of the delivery bodies apart from the Careers Service that they associated with young people. The problems of costing and pricing remained unresolved among all but two provider bodies. (The final four chapters of the report provide case studies of self-funding women; nonusers, after inquiry and initial guidance; employer-funded women; and employers. Attachments include details of service providers, entitlement form, and 60-item selected bibliography.) (YLB)

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INTEGRATED GUIDANCE AND ASSESSMENT FOR WORKING WOMEN

A Skill Choice Initiative

August 1994

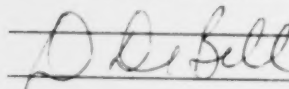
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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

"Guidance, advice and assessment" is an agreed high priority area amongst advocates of women's development, training, and employment needs. Diverse research evidence has confirmed this by citing the difficulties adult women experience in making **appropriate and cost effective** decisions about education and training in a complex learning system with a confusing range of qualifications and awarding bodies. Those difficulties are, of course, common to both men and women alike. The question at issue here is whether or not these difficulties, when linked to women's primary care responsibilities, are further weakening women's abilities to compete within the labour market. For example there is considerable evidence that various structural features of the education and training system are acting as barriers to women's participation.

Women currently make up 46% of the workforce. Given that National Targets for Education and Training for Lifetime Learning include the whole of the workforce, the simple logic of ensuring women's participation in training and development is not arguable. Recent labour market information suggests that this is not yet being achieved.

In the NACETT (National Advisory Council For Education And Training Targets) annual report, the relatively poor attainment of vocational qualifications by women was reported as a major cause for concern. There is nearly a ten percentage point difference in attainment of Foundation Targets and nearly a thirteen point difference between men and women in the achievement of Lifetime Target 3. The reason for the difference is not performance at GCSE and A level, as young women are, on average, better achievers than young men in these

examinations. It is because women are much less likely to gain vocational qualifications than men, particularly at level 3.

(Labour Market Quarterly Review, August 1994)

For women with domestic and/or caring responsibilities, these general training and development issues can be particularly complicated. To meet national targets, women **need to have information** about the location, timing, financial costs, and benefits of development activities. They also **need flexibility of service** so that individual commitment is not cancelled out by competing demands on personal time and finance. Indeed, the provision of 'guidance' services themselves follows this same pattern of need where women are concerned. In other words, **flexibility of access** to information is itself important, particularly if a woman is heavily committed to domestic and work responsibilities and/or is isolated from administration and advice centres.

A primary task in this particular pilot project and its evaluation has been the need to identify where issues like these are linked to women particularly and where they are equally applicable to men. On the whole, service flexibilities designed to meet women's needs actually benefit men as well.

NIACE has argued with regard to adults generally,

Without a comprehensive strategy for the provision of impartial advice and guidance to would-be learners, many individuals — especially those who have yet to participate in education and training since leaving school — are unaware of and unable to access learning opportunities.

(The Learning Imperative, NIACE, March 1993)

This is a widely accepted argument but it contains a number of implicit and complex issues.

- 1) Adult learners themselves do not think in terms of guidance and advice, impartial or not. Most think in terms of **places** of learning or of **sources** for information.
- 2) From a professional practitioner's perspective, guidance and advice for adults includes assistance with access to information about both the labour market and VET (the vocational and education training) system.
- 3) From the client's perspective, information about the labour market and information about learning (VET) opportunities are likely to be perceived as two quite different needs.
- 4) From the strategist's perspective, the labour market and the VET system are inextricably linked, thus the National Targets for Education and Training (NETTS) agreed by industry, government, the trades unions, and educationalists.

The project described in this report arises from the nexus between these varying perspectives on adult guidance and skills assessment. Funded through the Employment Department's national Skill Choice initiative, the project was designed to integrate and add value to what are often disparate activities in the guidance and assessment fields and to test, through action research, an integrated model designed, in the first instance, for women.

The Skill Choice model is based on this concept of integration and requires a contribution element from either the individual or the employer. In the project described in this report, Skill Choice was offered to a limited number of women and employers in the Norfolk and Waveney TEC area who both wanted the services and who could contribute 30% of the cost. The two-thirds balance was subsidised by the Employment Department.

The very concept of charging members of the public for careers guidance has been a politically sensitive issue for some time. This has not been a problem where employers are asked to contribute (eg, through staff development budgets) nor has it been a problem for APL (accreditation of prior learning) where APL provides a route to NVQ accreditation. The TEC movement and then the Careers Services were the first public sector bodies to offer guidance services on a cost recovery basis. These services have been additional to those already offered free to the registered unemployed — generally provided by the Employment Service.

The FE sector and universities have been **steadily increasing** their guidance services (both for actual and potential learners and including careers assistance) since the late 1980s. In none of these cases have charges or contributions been levied. The single most powerful argument against a contributions system for adult guidance services lies with the danger that it will raise financial barriers similar to those already evident within the VET system. One task within the Norfolk and Waveney project was to assess both the demand for value added services which required contribution and the capacity for supply to meet the specificity of that demand. Within that context, the evaluation also monitored the financial implications for individual women with particular attention to the point at which contributions could bar individuals from services.

The most important single finding has been the value of subsidy to women seeking NVQs through APL. This route to qualifications is less expensive and more flexible than the alternative qualification route through formal training programmes. Nevertheless, the total cost of acquiring an NVQ in this way includes registration, advisor support, assessment, and verification fees.

Embedded in the NIACE statement above are two implicit concerns that link into this particular project. First, the reference to a

"comprehensive strategy for provision" of advice and guidance implies that the recent proliferation of occasionally uncoordinated guidance services for adults needs a comprehensive and comprehensible (national or local) strategic approach. If so, two questions must be asked: **who** should be responsible for it and **how** should it be financed? Second, the reference to "impartial advice and guidance" implies a concern that provision by direct delivery bodies cannot be impartial. In other words, how far distant should guidance services be from the VET system?

In the project described in this report, a network of professional guidance providers were involved in delivering the services. Co-ordination was separate from delivery but linked into the action research and evaluation. **The emphasis throughout remained on rapid response to expressed client need.** The consequence of this approach had the effect of privileging some providers over others. For example, **APL was the most heavily used of the options within the model.**

This particular project set out with two underlying objectives:

- to bring much needed guidance and assessment resources for women into the Norfolk and Waveney area and
- to provide women with an integrated guidance and skills assessment service that offered in depth assistance over a period of time (ie, value added services).

The premise rested on evidence that women were, on balance, more isolated than men from information and communication networks about developments in both learning opportunities and movements in the labour market; were receiving fewer training opportunities from employers; were finding career planning more complex because of situational and dispositional factors; and were more likely to be engaged in the peripheral workforce and thus less likely to

have access to the VET system. The project itself was small in size, compared with Skill Choice targets elsewhere, with a subsidy budget for 267 units of service. In total, 105 women used 277 units of service. The model (see Figure 1) was based on a capacity to mix and match services from a menu of guidance and assessment options.

- The women who used the project were located throughout the region, including a good distribution within the remote rural areas.
- The age profile that emerged showed high activity rates amongst women over the age of 35.
- Just over half of all participating women were self funded rather than employer funded though a higher total number of units of service were purchased by employers than by individuals.
- Just over three quarters of the women were in waged work, half in part-time jobs.
- The women's occupational areas were concentrated in clerical/administration, managerial, and service industries but included the full range from receptionist to senior management.
- Educational backgrounds also represented the full distribution from early school leavers with no or few qualifications and no subsequent formal learning to women with degrees, postgraduate, and professional qualifications.
- No distinction was drawn between women returners and all other women workers. However, the vast majority (not all) had children and had experienced at least one break in career.

A significant finding within the project was the evidence that these women did not know about guidance services. Very few

had heard of any of the delivery bodies apart from the Careers Service which they associated with young people.

In 1991, Tony Watts argued that

The issue of whether and how to develop a more comprehensive guidance service for adults remains a key unresolved policy issue.

In June 1994, the RSA and the CBI (with over 50 subscribing member organisations sponsored by eight business organisations) launched a new lead body on guidance, the National Advisory Council for Careers and Educational Guidance (NACCEG). Quality standards will be a key responsibility and NACCEG will be working in the context of the government's recent White Paper on Competitiveness which re-emphasises the need for a coherent adult guidance system and one that fits into the concept of "careership".

How to finance good quality adult guidance is a key issue. In the project described in the following report, the problems of costing and pricing remained unresolved amongst all but two of the provider bodies. This has the knock-on effect of making it yet more difficult to undertake accurate cost benefit analyses of an area of support which needs to assess the difficult question of individual commitment to learning (ie, a human motivation question). It is also a concern reflected in Watts' reference to guidance as "a key unresolved policy issue". Careers guidance has emerged in the 1990s with an unprecedented prominence in public policy debates. This report is one contribution to those debates.

This report includes both a description and an evaluation of an action research project designed to test a model for providing **integrated guidance and assessment services** to adult women. The model was funded under the Employment Department's national Skill Choice initiative. As an R & D project, the findings include insights into the development issues involved in a model designed to provide stimulus for new product development specifically aimed at women. The research itself has been formative, running concurrently with the launch and implementation phases.

The project operated during the Spring and early Summer of 1994 and provided services to women across the Norfolk and Waveney TEC area. The model integrated in-depth guidance with APL assessment and tested the willingness of women and their employers to contribute to the cost of these services. A key feature has been the aim to add value to already existing services. Other features of the project were also tested and evaluated through case study research, including:

- partnership and co-ordination issues
- project development
- marketing
- service response to the integrated design
- actual and potential client response.

1.1 The aim of the project was:

To deliver and test through an applied project (underpinned by action research, monitoring and evaluation) a fully supported and integrated guidance and assessment service for working women. This to be based on guidance vouchers funded through partnership between government, employer, and/or individual.

1.2 The objectives were:

delivery of guidance vouchers which would deliver full client support (from initial advice through to after care) and with a menu of routes to meet individual guidance and assessment needs.

2. *To test the client market for front loaded, fast streaming guidance and assessment support that is individual and client centred.*
3. *To strengthen the network and infrastructure necessary for ultimate delivery of a fully supported guidance and APL assessment process capable of delivery to the adult population (both men and women) across Norfolk and Waveney (including delivery to people in rural areas).*
4. *To extend the existing adult guidance services in Norfolk and Waveney such that providers are offering the full range of guidance functions.*
5. *To diversify and strengthen the adult guidance services offered in the Norfolk and Waveney region.*
6. *To test and evaluate the process model.*
7. *To provide a process model with capacity for transferability to other areas of the country.*

1.3 Participating services

The guidance and assessment delivery bodies involved in directly providing these integrated services in supporting the project included:

- The Access Centre, City College Norwich
- APLACS (Accreditation of Prior Learning Advice & Consultancy Services)
- The Information Centre, Lowestoft College
- CDCs (Norwich & Waveney TEC)

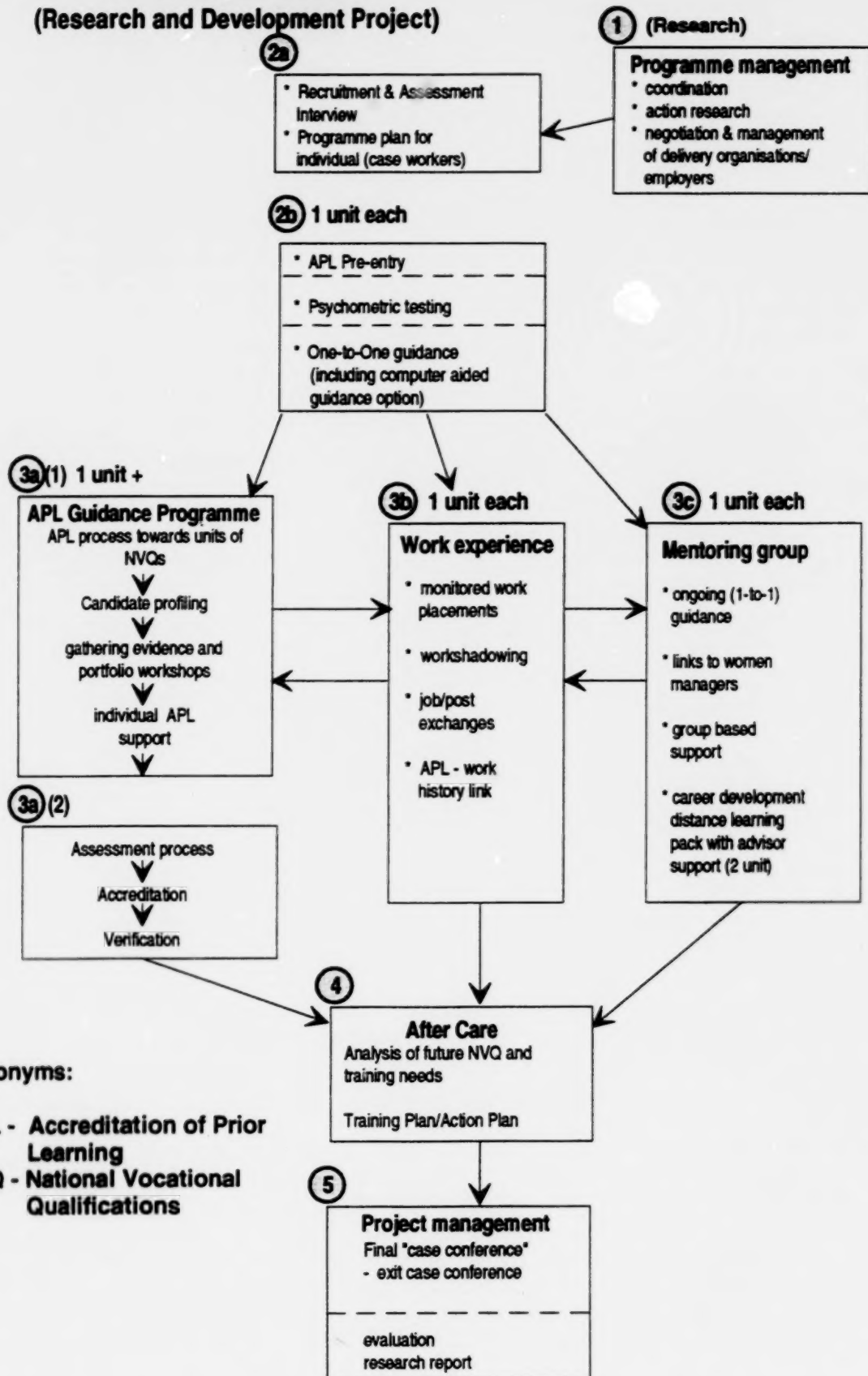
- RAN (Redundancy Advice Net work)
- The School of Management, Finance and Education, City College Norwich
- WEETU (Womens Employment, Enterprise and Training Unit).

See Attachment 1 for a brief description of each of these agencies.

1.4 Project design

The ideas underpinning this project were originally developed in mid 1993 and were based on the principle of integrating formal guidance services with APL assessment for NVQ levels 2 through 5 (see Figure 1).

PROCESS FOR WOMEN (Research and Development Project)



Acronyms:

APL - Accreditation of Prior Learning
NVQ - National Vocational Qualifications

The purpose was to enable clients to move from one aspect of guidance or assessment to another as suited individual need. The original model designed by the Research Unit at City College was enhanced by advice from the Women's Employment, Enterprise and Training Unit (WEETU). At the centre of the model was also an attempt to test the willingness of individuals and employers to contribute one third of the delivery cost. The value of testing the model with a specific market segment was one reason for the focus on "working women", defined from the outset as:

- women in employment (part or full time)
- women facing redundancy or recently made redundant
- women between jobs (broadly interpreted)
- women seeking job change and or upskilling (including those in unwaged work).

1.5 Women: the client group

The definitions of "working women" above were intentionally inclusive rather than exclusive. Women still overwhelmingly manage the responsibilities of childcare and family and, increasingly, eldercare. The consequence for individual women is often a discontinuous pattern of waged work, unwaged work, economic inactivity and voluntary work, often over many years. It is because of this pattern that women make up the large numbers of part-time labour (88% in 1993). Most of this is insecure and low paid work but can nevertheless be essential to the household budget. Such is the case in both single parent and two parent households. Women outside the waged labour market are also less likely than men to be registered unemployed because they are less likely to have paid national insurance during the appropriate qualifying period.

Skill Choice is an initiative focused primarily on employed adults though, across the country, some 15% of participants have benefited who were not in waged work at the time. With this particular project, it was recognised at the

outset that the concept of "employed adults" would be a potentially restrictive one where market testing was to occur with women only.

For example, few women with children experience the neatly packaged rhythms implied by the terms 'career break' and 'woman returner' (ie, full-time waged work followed by a period of economic inactivity in childcare, and then a full return to waged work). Most women spend many years in discontinuous cycles moving in and out of the labour market and voluntary work while balancing domestic responsibilities. Many will be 'returners' on a number of occasions. There are several underlying reasons for these patterns but most are linked into the general absence of support structures for working families.

In fact, few women leave waged work entirely for significantly long periods of time. Most do part-time work, often on an *ad hoc* basis over a period of years and many combine this with a wide variety of voluntary work (see examples within the case studies). When linked to the skills acquired in caring for and managing families, the phrase "working women" begins to suggest the broader profile of skills, experience and activities within the population of adult women who were the target group of this test project.

Women's labour market participation has been rapidly accelerating over the last twenty years and is projected to continue to grow. However, changing employment patterns coupled with continuingly poor support structures for women's care responsibilities mean that large numbers work in the peripheral workforce (part-time, seasonal, temporary contracts, or short-term fixed contracts in full-time posts). For example, the overwhelming majority of part-time workers are women and large numbers are under-employed in relation to their skills and potential.

Furthermore, with 46% of the labour force female, NETTS targets for individual lifetime learning cannot be met without targeting training and development activities which

meet women workers explicit needs.

A further purpose of the focus on women in this project was also a need to identify where any 'sticking points' might exist in women gaining access to a guidance and assessment model which requires a financial contribution either from the woman herself or from her employer. First, in broad terms, the evaluation has found that

- Participating employers welcomed the opportunity to support their peripheral workforce and were conscious that staff development budgets tend to favour core workers.
- Conversely, women working part-time were generally reluctant to ask for employer support because they expected their requests to be turned down. This supposition needs further testing.
- Some providers, though not all, who were offering the project's services felt anxious about 'selling' the services to employers on a single gender basis.
- Women using the services tended to respond to the publicity because it was identified as 'for women' yet were at pains to say that they felt men should have access to the services as well.
- Where group guidance was concerned, women reported positive benefits in working within single gender groups. They reported that they felt freer to discuss the inter-relationships between their domestic responsibilities and their career action plans (development needs) amongst women than would have been the case in a mixed group.
- Where women have used the

subsidised APL route to NVQs within the project, they have reported that the process fits with their work and domestic responsibilities far more effectively than formal, scheduled training programmes.

The overall profiles of women participating in this project are described in 4.16 but it has been striking that the age profile is relatively high. It was also the case that very few of these women knew about adult guidance services, much less assessment services, prior to the project.

When we analysed 'sticking' points, we found that they clustered around the following, now widely recognised, factors:

- situational (caring responsibilities which include child, family, and eldercare; poor access to primary use of personal transport; and financial barriers)
- structural (the need for flexibility of time and location)
- dispositional (concern about expenditure on the self and a lack of appreciation for personal skills competence - usually referred to as a lack of confidence).

With regard to the latter, reference to women's "low confidence levels" has been repeated so many times over such a long period that we found women referring to themselves in this way when evidence suggested otherwise. There is a need to adjust this deficit model of women by calling attention to **the need for women to be identified in terms of their areas of skills competence** - the model used in APL. This is particularly important in the context of NETTS and in an integrated guidance and assessment initiative such as Skill Choice.

McGivney (1994) commented,

Many women without qualifications have a wide range of skills. Pilot projects on

the accreditation of unpaid work consistently show that women are operating at the equivalent of NVQ level 3 in their unpaid work in the home and in voluntary organisations.

(Wasted Potential, NIACE, 1994)

1.6 Client contributions and voucher systems

Within the model, women were charged a third of the value of each service they selected. In essence, this was a voucher system. Voucher systems for guidance services elsewhere have generally been used to supply free guidance for the registered unemployed. This project, in contrast, and as part of the Skill Choice initiative, introduced vouchers to "working women" and/or their employers following a 30% financial contribution. In effect, the service purchased was government subsidised.

Where guidance services are concerned, we anticipated some resistance to "charging". This proved to be far less an issue than expected. Charging for APL support was already in place and there were no objections to client contributions. Quite the reverse, the subsidy here was welcomed. APL on a one to one basis is proving to be an expensive route to NVQs largely because it is new, labour intensive and blurs the boundary between guidance and training. Nevertheless, it has particular value for women who have had a break in career and APL services were the most heavily used of all options within the model. **From a provider perspective, APLACS became the "engine room" of this project.**

Though the project actually introduced vouchers into the Norfolk and Waveney area, we took the decision at an early stage not to use the actual term "voucher" but rather to use the concept of subsidised "entitlement". We avoided the word "voucher" because:

- it has attracted considerable resistance amongst guidance workers themselves
- it still has associations with

immigration controls and quota systems which limited the numbers of people of new commonwealth origin allowed to enter the United Kingdom from various East African countries

- it has come to be associated with a range of perceived notions of inequity
- it has become linked to notions of inappropriate or inefficient competitive models of market creation where used in the education/training field.

The decision to avoid the use of the term 'voucher' could be a simple 'fudge'. However, the outcome has proved to be fairly straightforward and, with some reservations, carried the support of providers.

The evaluation indicates that delivery bodies have welcomed the notion of a service subsidy or client 'entitlement' where that has stimulated supply and demand.

Women and employers purchasing services were provided with Entitlement Forms (see Attachment 2) which specified the services purchased, the numbers of units purchased and the name of the service provider.

A key issue facing any charging policy for guidance services, however, is the potential link in the public mind with information/advice as a free commodity. APL, on the other hand, as a new service and one with a more clearly tangible outcome, is not assumed to be cost free. Yet, to charge for a guidance service generally runs counter to received notions about the provision of public services. For historic reasons, there is also residual resistance to charging amongst some guidance delivery bodies in the public sector.

In all cases where there was objection to charging we found that this rested quite rightly with concern about those women who could not

afford the contribution and were thereby likely to be barred from access.

There must be freedom of access to information and advice about learning opportunities. This is, in fact, already increasing within the FE and Adult Education sectors under pressure from the FEFC. However, where an **in-depth guidance service** independent of training bodies is concerned, there are three immediate recommendations which arise from the findings in this evaluation:

- For those services within this model which extend over a period of time, individual contributions that mirror best practice on fees remission in the FE and Adult Education sectors are a reasonable way forward. (Note that 'group guidance' is already very close in its format and objectives to women's subsidised re-entry programmes offered by education/training delivery bodies and could thus be charged at similar rates).
- For those who, for financial or situational reasons, are unlikely to use guidance and advice services (including those who perceive education as 'for others'), freely accessible community based initiatives are essential. In such cases, local networks are particularly important (see **Paying for Skills**, 1991).
- For those who would benefit from the APL route to NVQs but who cannot afford the costs, even if part subsidised, specific 'ring fenced' funds need to be identified for grants. These could be identified from within the core budget for government funded training schemes. Such a move would immediately add flexibility to the current systems of provision.

There has been a tendency to confuse 'training

credits' with guidance 'vouchers/entitlements'. The two are not the same and the similarities are negligible. However, at present the case **against** individual (as opposed to employer) contributions to guidance services has yet to be proved because the benefit to the individual of in-dept guidance, advice and counselling **has yet to be demonstrated in cost benefit terms**. On the other hand, **evidence of value to individuals in terms of motivation is evident in every case study throughout all the existing research**.

What is clear **at present** is that demonstrating social benefit alone is not proving sufficient to persuade local or central government bodies to **ensure** the existence of independent guidance services.

The onus is now on the guidance field to support its findings of value to individuals with evidence that will also win the public expenditure debate. At present, NETTS baselines are the most effective lever being used because they are widely supported and because they are based on an argument for increasing national economic and social prosperity. This is the link that must be made by guidance bodies.

1.7 Guidance and assessment as a sub system of VET

To achieve NETTS amongst the adult workforce, it is now widely agreed that **guidance and skills assessment** are key tools for increasing participation and for matching learning routes to individual need. At the same time, both guidance and assessment are sub systems of the core learning environment. They precede and/or run parallel with direct education and training programmes and, in financial terms, the benefit of investment has yet to be adequately demonstrated (Killeen, White and Watts, 1992). This is in contrast to the overwhelming evidence of benefit derived from direct investment in VET.

The problems attached to cost benefit analysis (how to justify government expenditure) have

kept adult guidance services in a seriously fragile state of economic insecurity since the late 1980s. An emerging option has been to look at joint funding of these services shared between government, employers, and individuals. It is this approach that has been tested in this project.

One opportunity within such a context is that product development (ie, provision of new value added services) offers a rationale and justification for transferring some of the costs on to the user, in this case, women and their employers. The "value added" features of the services offered within this particular test model were:

- increased variety and depth of service
- rational links between services
- continuity of client advisor throughout
- choice of time and location (inbuilt access flexibility)
- a personal action/training plan and/or units towards an NVQ.

The project evaluation findings suggest that public awareness of guidance and assessment services is very low. Only a few women using these services had previously used guidance services at all and only one had knowledge of APL. Several knew of the Careers Service but associated it with young people. These findings are consistent with other recent research (nb, SCPR, July 1994) which has found that people think in terms of **places** where they might go when they need **information**.

Though "guidance and assessment" are currently identified as high priority services amongst advocates of women's development, training and employment needs, most women are not fully aware of what 'guidance' involves or how to access it. What they do understand and identify is a need for 'information and advice' with some also seeking 'counselling' for career development needs. It is important that advisors understand that **the terminology of 'guidance' is a professional concept**. Client terminology such as **'information and advice'**

needs to be used when communicating with the public.

This project was designed to stimulate the existing and potential market for professional guidance and assessment services. 'Market' in this context refers to the stimulation of both the supply of and demand for these services. In other words, the 'market' in this model was not designed to stimulate competition between delivery bodies.

All these features of the model were monitored and evaluated through the research activities of the project.

Contracted by TEED, the Research Unit acted as initiator, facilitator, and support to the partners delivering the project. It was responsible for sub-contracting the service delivery, co-ordinating the project, and for undertaking the research and evaluation, including quality assurance assessment and, to some degree, cost benefit analysis. The Research Unit also undertook the initial marketing of the project on behalf of all the organisations involved and did so with support from the College Access Centre which provided a direct telephone line and acted as an initial information point for the project.

Following initial regional press releases people making enquiries were sent a free Information Pack from either the Access Centre or the Research Unit. Packs were also provided to the delivery bodies for further distribution. The Pack itself was developed by the Research Unit. Professional guidance and assessment agencies were entirely responsible for delivery of services and for follow up marketing.

2. THE RESEARCH DESIGN (PROJECT EVALUATION)

2.1 Conduct of the evaluation

The overall purpose of the project evaluation was to test this model of integrating guidance and assessment for both efficacy in meeting client needs and for cost benefit. Within this broad aim, a number of strands or themes were monitored. The key questions explored by the research revolved around:

- project & product development
- marketing the project
- stimulation of the market and of new product development
- charging for services
- value added aspects of the services
- quality assurance
- equal opportunities
- impact of the project on the region's guidance and assessment provision.

The project was evaluated using a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. There was greater emphasis on the former as much of the research was formative and thus concerned with processes rather than outcomes. Nevertheless, both individual and organisational outcomes have been identified where possible. As the evaluation ran concurrently with development and implementation of the pilot project, insights into outcomes were still emerging as this report went to press.

From the outset, careful records were kept of all project decisions, meetings, correspondence, publicity and individual experiences/decisions. Monitoring systems were set up to track requests for Information Packs, subsequent enquiries, and participating clients. In addition, the action research focused on a sample of individual women and employers who used the project's services plus the participating agencies, all of whom were contacted and interviewed on a number of occasions over a six month period.

The evaluation looked at the development and operation of the model, how and why services

were used, how they contributed to women's decision making about their work and career development and how they fitted in with employers' needs.

The methods used were:

- case studies based on in depth interviews with a sample of 20 participants and 43 non-participants
- ongoing monitoring of the project and service providers' management information systems
- the tracking of all women and employers who contacted the project
- collection of background data on all women using the project
- telephone survey of a sample of non-participants, focusing on their responses to marketing
- telephone survey of a sample of participants, focusing on service outcomes.

2.2 Administration of the project

The Research Unit set up an administration system whereby entitlement forms were supplied to clients immediately on receipt of payment (or request for invoice from employers). On the same day, the selected delivery agency was notified to respond directly to the client and to arrange initial service provision within a maximum period of seven days (see Figure 2).

Service providers, in turn, claimed £90 for each completed service by providing a copy of the individual's action/training plan, a brief monitoring form completed by the woman herself, and a copy of the original entitlement form. The monitoring forms contained information about how the woman first heard about the project, her age group, ethnic origin, employment status or not and whether she had any disability which affected her ability to work.

From the monitoring systems it was, for example, possible to map by area the use of the

project's services. In particular, rurality was a central concern from the start yet geographic spread was very wide (see Maps 1 and 2). It was also, for example, possible to examine the use of each service by the employment status of those participating in the project.

A telephone survey of women who had requested an Information Pack but who made no follow up enquiries was also undertaken. Its main purpose was to obtain feedback about the Information Pack itself, about initial marketing, and to obtain women's views on the relevance of the project to their circumstances. Women were also provided with additional information about the project during these follow-up enquiries if they requested it. This monitoring system thus made it possible also to track women whose interest was rekindled by the research phone call itself.

In depth action research through intensive case studies was carried out with a sample of twenty individual women (see Sections 5, 6 and 7) and with employers who used the project's services (see Section 8). They include three women who requested an Information Pack but did not purchase any of the services.

Research interviews were also conducted with the service providers. Their comments are integrated throughout this report.

A second telephone survey of just over 30 women was carried out at the end of the project. Its purpose was to explore the first stage impact of the project particularly in terms of VET where women had used services within the project.

The documentary evidence, monitoring data, and information from the interviews were used to explore and assess the core evaluation questions. The research does not provide definitive answers but rather offers insights into and contributes to the debate about (a) partial charging for guidance and assessment services, and (b) any specific requirements for such services that may be linked to gender. The questions raised by this project are as valuable as the answers

that have emerged.

PROJECT ADMINISTRATION

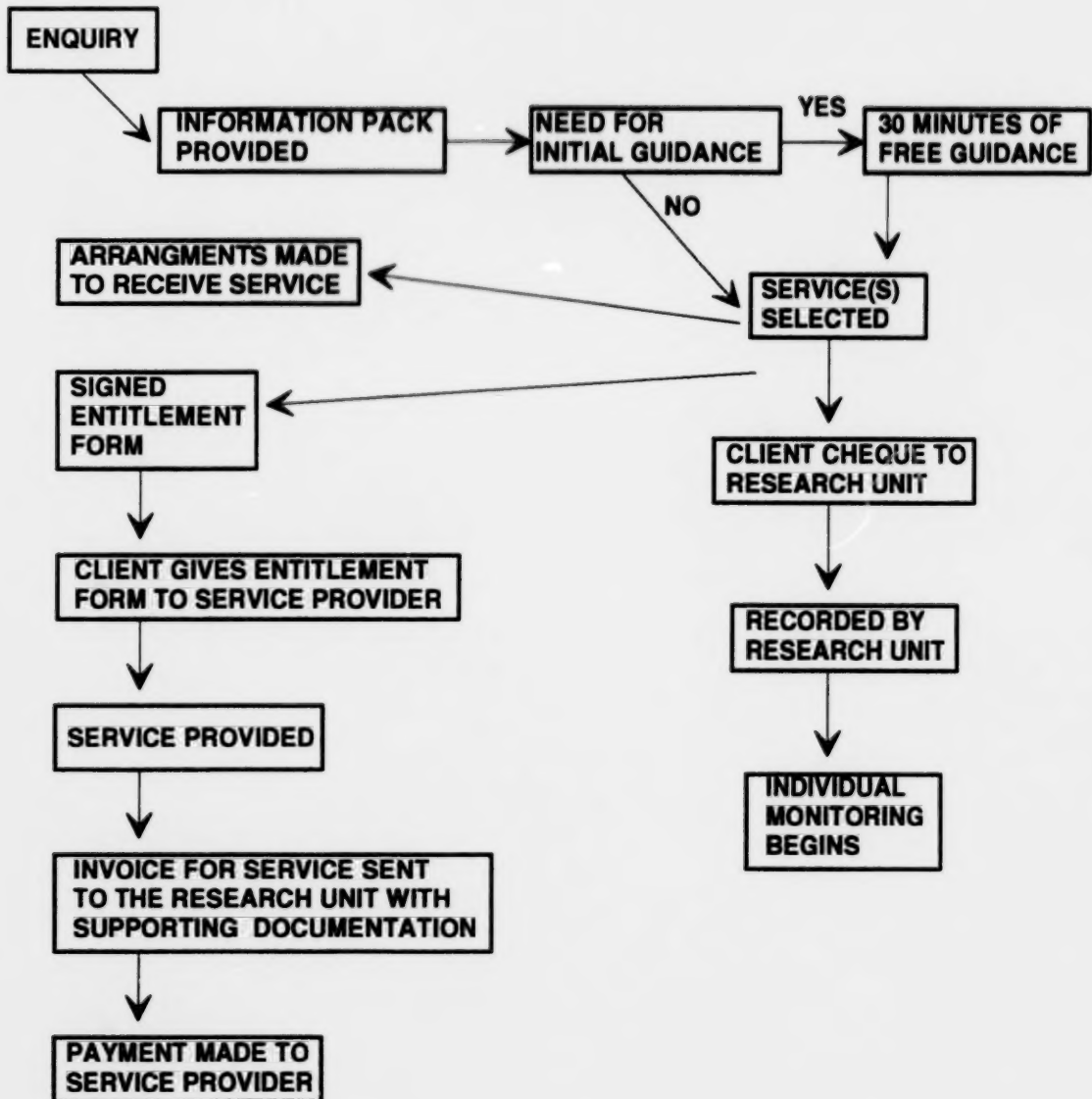
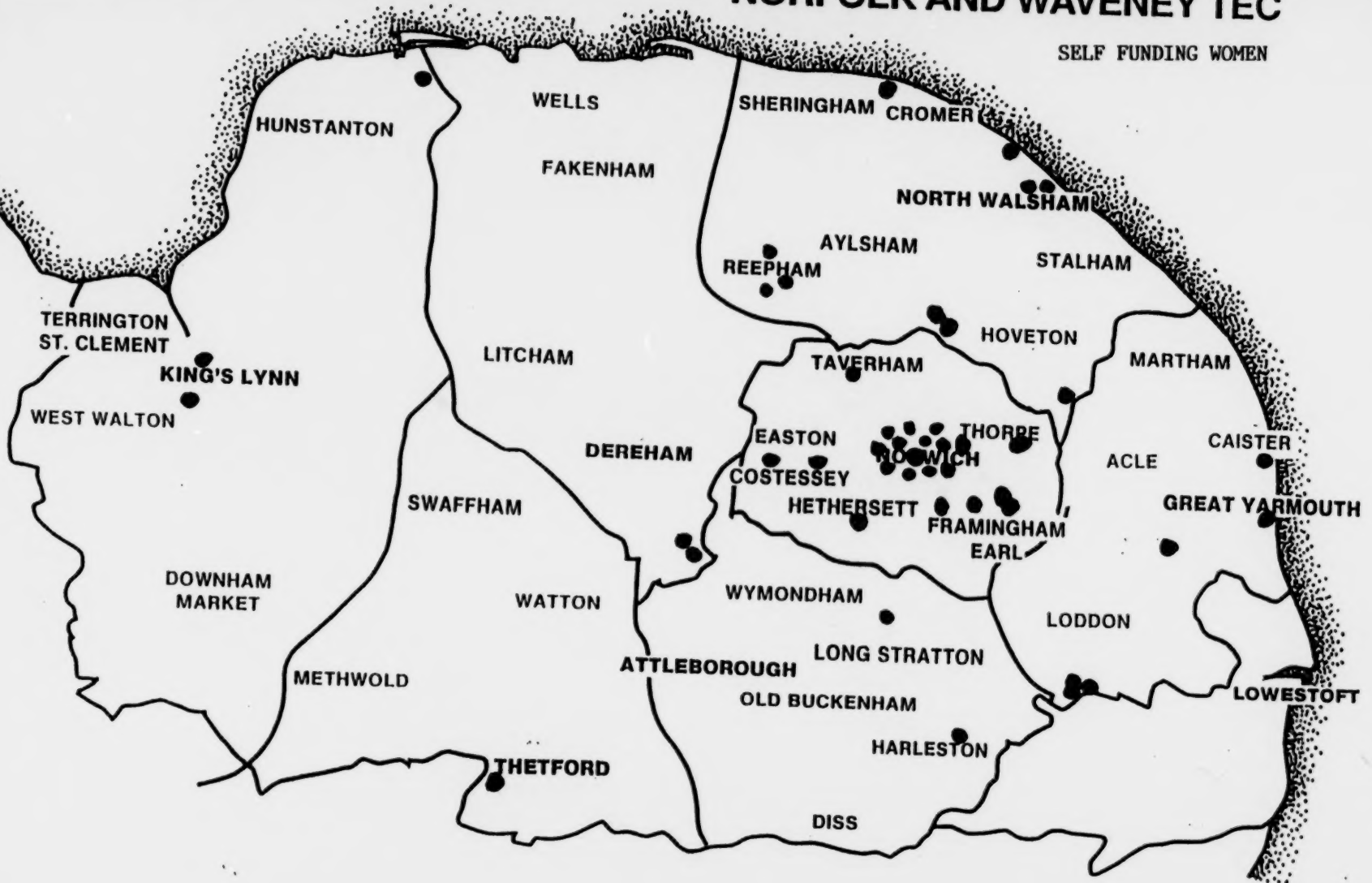


Figure 2

NORFOLK AND WAVENEY TEC

SELF FUNDING WOMEN

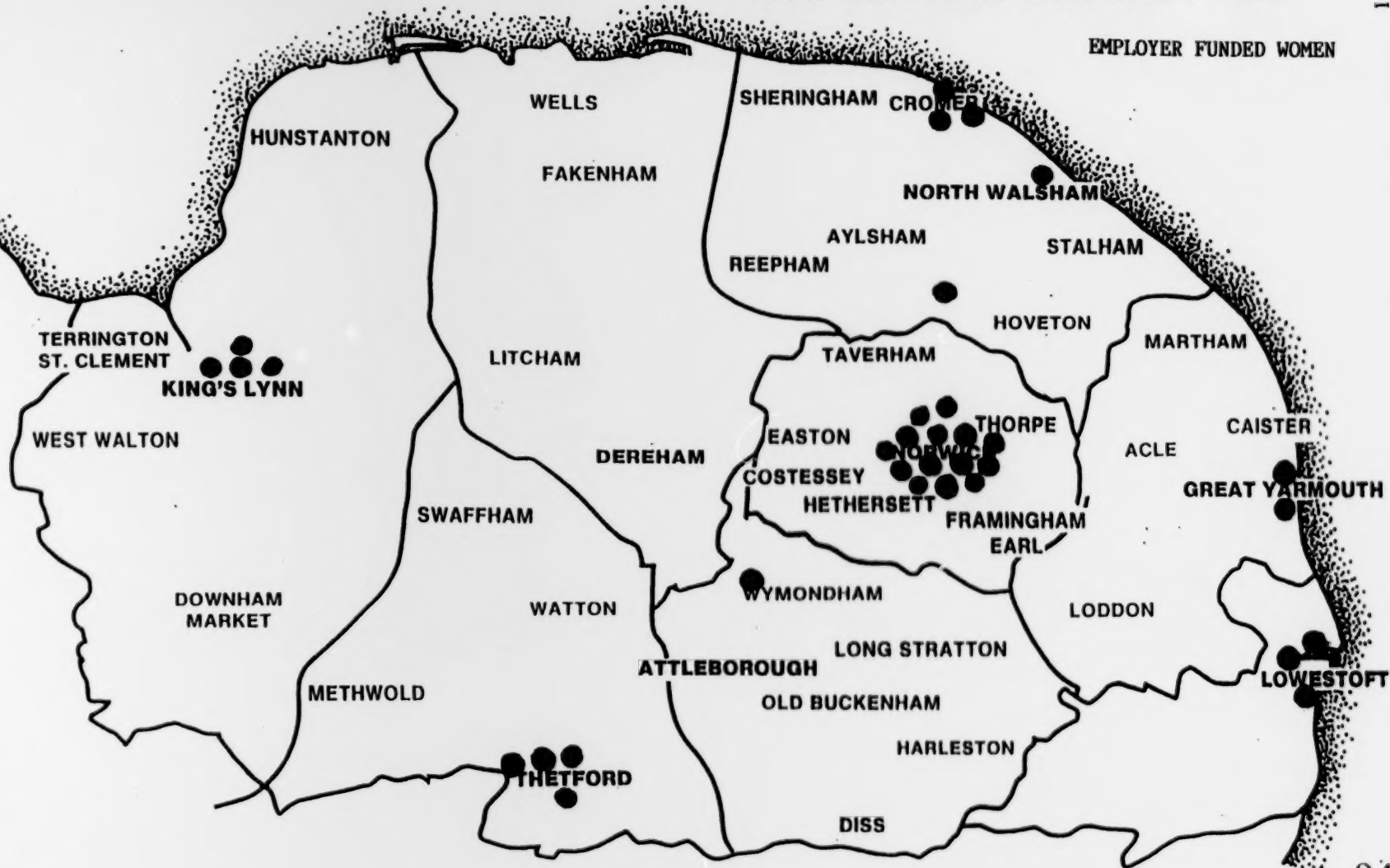


MAP 1

NORFOLK AND WAVENEY TEC

17

EMPLOYER FUNDED WOMEN



MAP 2

24

23

3. THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

3.1 The national context

The project was funded within the Skill Choice initiative, one of the Employment Department's strategies designed to trigger individual commitment to education and training and to personal career development through partnership investment. The initiative's expressed objectives which this Norfolk and Waveney project was aligned to test in pilot stage were the capacity to provide:

- ready access to comprehensive - and comprehensible information about education and training opportunities available;
- advice and guidance to help people make effective decisions about their future career and learning needs;
- an opportunity for the formal assessment of the skills and knowledge that an individual has, in order to gain recognised qualifications for what they already know and can do - and use the results as a way forward in their career planning.

The initiative's national aim was to help 250,000 individuals by:

- developing effective and comprehensive local information, assessment and guidance services for people at work;
- putting individuals in control of their careers by offering credits, which they can use to buy the guidance and assessment services which they choose.

In context, this project has been a small scale pilot (267 units of subsidised service purchased by 105 women) but with very specific intentions. Its **design for service integration** was intentionally ambitious in order to meet complex client needs. At the same time, pilot testing on a target market segment has made it possible to specify, in this case, the needs which are characteristic of women workers (some 46% of the UK labour force).

Fifteen TECs/LECs in England, Wales and Scotland have been involved in the Skill Choice initiative. All are providing subsidised guidance services to employers and individuals in employment but with broad variations in approach to service and delivery. There are variations between the initiatives. For example, we understand that Hertfordshire TEC has integrated Skill Choice into its Gateways to Learning and Access to Assessment initiatives in order to provide a "seamless" service to individuals and employers.

Each TEC/LEC has had a target to reach in terms of the number of individuals provided with services and with subsequent action plans. These targets have varied between 8,000 and 18,000 per TEC. They can include up to 15% unemployed people but the emphasis has been on those in employment. Skill Choice work began in 1993/4 and is continuing during 1994/5. It is being evaluated by Coopers & Lybrand.

Both Gateways and AA1 preceded Skill Choice. We found that in Norfolk and Waveney there has been much energy expended in seeking access to these categories of funding but also in attempting both to maintain existing services and to integrate into that provision the varying objectives of each of these initiatives. We found some evidence of change "overload" as well as some evidence that provider bodies need relatively long lead times for new product development. This is not an irresponsible position to take where funding is short term and product take up is uncertain.

Given this context, the willing involvement of key Norfolk and Waveney guidance agencies in this pilot is an indication of the high activity levels and partnership achievements in the region. There were variable levels of service delivery from these agencies (see Table 5 in Section 4.11) and there was constructive criticism about the speed with which the pilot was implemented. In terms of the framework objectives, it is fair to say that the pilot has been a success from the perspective of service users. Service providers, on the other hand, have been

3.2. The local context: profile of Norfolk and Waveney

The Norfolk and Waveney TEC area is one of the largest in the country with a population close to 1 million and total hectares which place it amongst the top five TECs in geographical size. The area includes the county of Norfolk and the district of Waveney in Suffolk. The largest urban concentration is in Norwich with a TTWA of approximately 300,000. The four other major towns are Lowestoft, Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn, and Thetford. Of these four, all but Thetford are coastal ports.

Unemployment in the area has varied since 1990 by location and industry profile. Great Yarmouth carries Intermediate Area Status for central government support. Two-thirds of Norfolk and Waveney is a designated Rural Development Area. In addition, the north and western areas of Norfolk have recently been awarded Objective 5B Status by the EC.

These support structures indicate the range of economic development need in the region, much of it linked to factors associated with rurality (eg, radical reductions in agriculture related employment; poor transport infrastructure; decline in industries linked to fisheries, food production/processing, engineering, construction, offshore oil and gas; and the knock-on effects of both MAFF and the European Common Agricultural Policy).

In addition, legislation since the late 1980s has brought major reorganisation within all public sector bodies and the region has seen relatively high levels of redundancy amongst supervisory staff and middle managers in both the public and private sectors.

Norwich, in contrast to other parts of the region, employs more than half of its workers within the service sectors. These are large employers of women. For example, reductions in total staff numbers at Norwich Union, the largest single employer in the TEC area, outside the health

youth employment and women's employment. Similar large scale redundancies have occurred in British Telecom, Eastern Electricity, Anglia Television, and as a result of the RAF closures of four airbases affecting civilian workers.

Between 1981 and 1989, the TEC area's population increased by almost double the average for non-metropolitan localities. This growth occurred primarily in the 15-49 age group. But projections to the year 2006 indicate a shift in growth to the 45-49 age group and large growth amongst the retired 64 plus and the elderly 75 plus. There is, thereby, a likely shift upwards in the average age of the adult pool available for and active in employment. In addition, the continuing increase in population amongst the retired and those over the age of 75 suggest employment growth is likely to occur in service support fields for the elderly. Much of this work is traditionally within predominantly women's occupational areas, including paid work, the voluntary sector, and unwaged eldercare. When these factors are coupled with changing skill needs, there is evidence of an increasing need for adult access to education and retraining. Career guidance and skills assessment for adults is a necessary feature of that total employment and VET picture.

3.3 Adult guidance in Norfolk and Waveney

The profile of adult guidance services in Norfolk and Waveney follows the general pattern across the UK. With the demise of the Occupational Guidance Units in the early 1980s, adult guidance work generally disappeared until LEA assisted Education Support Grants for Adults (ESGAs) and REPLAN began to fund pilot projects in the late 1980s. Norfolk won a three year ESGA grant in 1988 which funded the Norfolk Guidance Service (NGS) managed by Norfolk County Council LEA until 1991. The focus was largely on support of the unwaged, particularly those in rural areas. During 1991/92, Norfolk and Waveney TEC continued that funding. However, this was for

a transition period only and the TEC created an entirely new infrastructure for adult guidance with the launch of its five Career Development Centres (CDCs) in May 1992. The CDCs are located in high street premises in the five centres of population (see Attachment 1). Many former NGS staff are employed within the CDCs thus retaining the local expertise gained through NGS and its networks.

Also emerging in 1988, the Women's Employment, Enterprise and Training Unit (WEETU) was established as a voluntary organisation designed to meet the specific guidance needs of women. WEETU has diversified its activities since that date and worked closely with NGS in developing training programmes validated by the RSA for workers who needed qualifications in adult careers guidance. WEETU has also played a lead role in developing APL for units of NVQ and manages the APL Advice and Consultancy Service (APLACS) which is funded by the TEC. Both WEETU and APLACS played lead roles in implementation of the project.

The statutory Careers Services in Norfolk and Suffolk have, since 1992, been extending their services to adults and both organisations are currently in voluntary partnership management agreements with the TEC. Under the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill, statutory responsibility for careers services is being transferred out of local education authorities. During the period of this project, the organisational and financial pressures on the participating Norfolk Careers Service were thereby significant. The timing for careers service involvement in this project was not propitious.

The TEC's Careers Development Centres have been through a series of adjustments since their launch but, on the whole, they manage the greatest total volume of adult guidance within the region. The majority of this work is with the unemployed though the CDCs do not limit access and have been consistently seeking to expand their services to the employed. They work closely with the Employment Service.

Also within the map of developing services, colleges of FE, FHE, and universities are all involved in providing guidance services for adults. The rate of investment has been highly variable between institutions across the region. However, FEFC funding criteria (ie, 4% income linked to 'on entry' services) has produced intense activity around the development of guidance services within the further education colleges particularly.

The picture thereby is one of very rapid (ie, post 1988) development across Norfolk and Waveney and it is within this context that the current project has been operating. In common with most areas across the UK, "current provision of advice and or guidance on educational opportunities for adults remains *ad hoc*. The statutory base for 'helping adults to learn' is tentative..." (NIACE, 1993).

The professionalism of the guidance (and assessment) services that are in place in the region are not in question. But providers in Norfolk and Waveney, as elsewhere, are faced with considerable challenges in producing systems of co-ordination and partnership which meet adult client need across the whole spectrum of demand amongst the employed, unemployed, and economically inactive. Each provider is, of necessity, working to its own internal organisational agenda as well as attempting to meet diverse external client needs.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Project development and co-ordination

The project was designed to operate as a dispersed model with the services provided by a number of different agencies working in combination across the region. The Research Unit acted as co-ordinator for the project during this pilot period. The consensus amongst managers of the participating agencies is that a central co-ordinating body with responsibility for overall management of the project, including marketing, financial management, liaison and co-ordination of service delivery, is necessary for an integrated model of this kind to work. In addition there was a strong feeling that the co-ordinating role must be held by a body that is not involved in direct service delivery.

The implicit local model for such a role was the Redundancy Advice Network (RAN) which, at the close of the project, was testing feasibility for service development into whole workforce services (see case study at 4.17). Should RAN expand its capability in this way, it would be well placed to play this co-ordinating role.

The key areas of administration that need single focus co-ordination for an integrated model of this kind involve marketing; financial management; liaison between individuals/employers and the delivery bodies; and monitoring service response. There is always a danger that individuals may 'get lost' between diverse service providers. Indeed we found evidence that this currently happens.

The need for a central co-ordinator was reiterated by most of the agencies involved in the service delivery:

In general there is definitely a need for a co-ordinator for a network. Each organisation has its own goals and priorities. There's got to be someone to pull it all together.

[If there is no co-ordinator] it becomes

confusing for all the parties - individuals, employers, providers. Someone is needed to make the initial contact with women and service providers and who knows how it all fits together. This person should brief all service provider managers, who should then brief their staff.

It is essential that there is a co-ordinator.

The co-ordinator needs to be someone practical, who can see through the politics and who remembers the needs of clients.

In essence, a 'network' of diverse agencies needs direction where a specific initiative is involved. A delicate balance occurs where design of a new product is not 'owned' by all providers. A steering group of provider representatives is an effective way to manage an overall co-ordinating body for a project of this kind.

4.2 Network participation

For this pilot, a **selective tendering process** was used to invite agency involvement at the start of the project. Existing guidance providers were invited to submit formal tenders if they wished to play a part in the project. Contracts to deliver were then supplied with specifications for service to meet the project's needs. Though not built into the project design at the outset, the tendering process had a number of beneficial effects:

- each organisation invited to tender had the opportunity to actively express its wish to be involved in the project (a measure of commitment)
- each tendering organisation put in writing which services it would like to offer as part of the project and how these would be translated into service units of £90 value (a means of systematising service pricing)

- the process ensured that each service paid for could also carry **enhanced value** compared with any comparable free guidance service already available in the region.

The overall purpose of tendering was to ensure financial probity and integrity. The key organisations named in the original proposal to TEED identified the key actors with expertise in the services required (the CDCs, WEETU and APLACS). However, other agencies within the region are, by formal contracts and informal links, connected with these three key organisations. The danger at the outset was a potential for splitting or compromising established working relationships between agencies across Norfolk and Waveney. It is worth noting that Suffolk Careers Advisory Service, the University of East Anglia Careers Service, and the One-To-One, Partners for Progress initiative (an advocacy and guidance service for adults with special needs) all chose not to tender for involvement in the project. All were invited to do so. The outcome of the tendering process was in these cases valuable because the decision about whether or not to work within the project was placed firmly within the hands of the organisations themselves.

However, there were also tensions within the tendering process. Some of the service providers did not become involved in the project until the tendering stage and were therefore unclear about the model itself and how to identify their services in terms of £90 units. The process of tendering disclosed the variety of approaches to costing and pricing already in existence within the formal guidance and assessment fields. There was also some initial anxiety that providers were being asked to compete with each other. To some degree this was true. However, early decisions to allocate clients and funding by nature of service profile and location avoided direct competition within the project, albeit on a slightly artificial basis.

Future projects will need to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of using a tendering process of this kind. Some of the

tensions created were, however, related to other critical features - initial design, timing and co-ordination/information communication.

Only WEETU, a TEC senior manager, and the project steering group had been involved in the initial design of the model. This caused tension amongst some of the other providers who, though they wished to be involved in delivery, expressed irritation that they had not been a part of the early design team. This was entirely understandable.

At the same time, both guidance and assessment services across the region are developing in response to different agendas with variable service objectives. **The model under test is designed to offer a 'menu' of choice to clients across services and to integrate what are currently dispersed options.** There is still some question about whether this is achievable for the whole adult client population. As the project came to the end of its funded period, there was evidence of unequal demand on services from women and their employers but **evidence of demand for this kind of integrated service provision is not in question.**

4.3 Project time-scale and development issues

Issues to do with project **timing** and lead time for development were a central problematic feature of this pilot in the early stages. The pressures to launch the project meant that the tendering process, the preparation of the marketing Information Pack, and the media launch all overlapped. This was necessary for a pilot project of only six months.

Most of the service providers commented on the effects of this speed and strongly argued for the need to provide more time for development work before a public launch of the project,

The time scale was not really practical. More time was needed to develop and promote the project.

There is no question that this observation is true.

Having said that, the model by end July 1994 was firmly in place. The administrative systems were providing rapid response and demand for the subsidised services was developing at exponential rates (see Figures 3 and Section 4.10).

The need for **open information systems and consultation** between all the organisations involved in the project was identified as crucial by all of the service providers:

Nothing divides more than a lack of information.

The partners should have been more involved from the beginning on a consultative basis.

It would have helped if [all] the agencies had known that the project was coming along and been able to have had discussions with each other to do planning and development work for it.

The project benefited greatly from the fact that there were already strong links between many of the service providers involved in the project, particularly through the RAN network and through the TEC's Guidance and Advice Project Development (GAPD) group. Providers commented,

There is a history of good partnership working in Norfolk.

Virtually all the agencies were working together anyway.

The project was thus able to tap into and benefit from these existing relationships. Despite this, the project's experience was similar to that of the early Gateway's pilots in other parts of the country,

Most of the TEC pilots found the development phase to be more challenging than originally envisaged.

**(Gateways to Learning
Summary of Findings from the**

First Round Pilots, February 1993)

Based on the experience of this project in Norfolk and Waveney, there does need to be a longer **development phase** prior to the public launch of new services. The primary purpose here is to meet providers' organisational needs. During this period the likely service providers need to be contacted and involved in discussions about both the project and how to operationalise it - the nitty gritty of how it will all fit together. There was considerable criticism from providers on the following features of this project:

- the short time scale (six months from start-up to completion)
- the requirement that services be systematised into £90 units of value by all providers
- the suggestion that follow up marketing after the initial Research Unit press launch should become the providers' responsibility
- the restriction of services to women only.

Having made these points and others, the providers were, nevertheless, positive about the model and would like to see it continue, albeit with adjustments that reflect the lessons learned. For example, all providers found that new product development is difficult in the current climate of structural and funding change which is affecting capacity to maintain current service levels. This proved to be particularly true for WEETU, a small voluntary organisation. Given that the project was piloted with women, WEETU's public project role as a women's professional advice and guidance service should have been more prominent throughout. Its major role emerged through its management of APLACS and its provision of group guidance services for women.

The tendering process also needs to be completed well before the start of the project. Service providers wanted much more extensive briefing on the model itself and they also wanted

increased input on design. They further expressed the wish to be consulted on the marketing strategy and the content of the publicity material. These are all valid assessments.

On the other hand, a project of such short duration would have been unlikely to succeed without a rapid implementation programme. The danger in such a situation is that top-down administration of this kind can alienate delivery bodies. Yet characteristically in such a situation, the existing partnership activities appeared on balance to be strengthened by nature of these combined objectives to the rapid implementation of the project.

In addition, because the Research Unit **prioritised client need and choice**, there was wide disparity between levels of involvement amongst the delivery bodies. All were extremely co-operative in ensuring rapid response and continuity of both service and advice for each woman. Nevertheless, the client demand was predominantly for APL services. In effect, this meant that APLACS became "engine room" of the project.

On balance, consultation and information are critical to the operation of an effective partnership. See RAN case study (4.17) for evidence of the long period required for a new model to reach maturity and to gain the trust of providers.

4.4 Product development

The model (Figure 1) was originally conceived as a way to assist adults in accessing what currently exists as a range of services offered by a variety of organisations. The underlying purpose was to offer a 'mix 'n match' menu which would support women through all the stages of skill assessment and guidance needs without requiring them to search their way through the current plethora of services across the region.

A second, equally important objective was to encourage **new product development**. Where

individuals are asked to make a financial contribution to guidance services, **the product itself must have additionality**. Attempts to make guidance 'profitable' have not been successful (see PA Cambridge Economic Consultants Ltd, 1993). Indeed, there are strong economic and social benefit arguments which question the very premise that they should be.

Nevertheless, there is now widespread acceptance that value added services may justify a contribution element **from those who can afford it**. The difficulty lies in making that assessment in such a way as to **not raise financial barriers** while also ensuring that independent and impartial services for adults both survive and flourish. The **difficulties** of financing services, other than those linked to direct training bodies, are not going to go away.

In testing a partial charging policy for guidance services, there was an opportunity to **add value to existing products**. We found, for example, that clients wanted **consistency** of advice and advisor; **flexibility** in delivery times and locations; **rapid** response to need; and **tangible outcomes** (see 1.7 above).

4.5 Marketing

A number of lessons were learned about marketing that proved to be consistent with findings in other Skill Choice initiatives. At the outset, press and radio interviews produced high response rates in the days following each event. Few of these, however, translated into immediate take up. The popular press and radio also failed to reach employers. They were approached personally by letter and visits. Both individuals and employers tended to require long lead times for decision making. In many, but not all cases, both individuals and employers also required fairly lengthy preliminary discussions. There was also evidence of confusion between 'guidance and assessment', on the one hand, and education or training "courses" on the other hand. What precisely was being offered needed very clear explanation.

The pattern of take up once publicity began was

marked by very few women in the initial stages followed by exponential rates of commitment from May onward. By the close of the project, at the end of July, 277 entitlements to service (ten above contract budget) had been allocated and a further 170+ had been requested (nb, during August, a month in which low activity rates would normally be expected). **The likely future viability of the project model was not in question.**

There was considerable evidence of increased **provider** marketing activity (both formal and informal) in the latter stages and also evidence of networks or 'word of mouth' increasing demand.

The following main lessons about marketing emerged:

- individuals understand services where they are described as "career information and advice" (ie, **not** "guidance and assessment")
- Employers understand "staff development support" (ie, **not** "guidance and assessment")
- both want to know the "benefits"
- both need initial (screening) advice
- both want Information Packs before personal meetings
- employers respond to personal and, usually, repeated meetings with someone who understands their needs
- press marketing needs to be very simply stated
- response to enquiries needs to be immediate.

In addition, where very large numbers of

subsidised units of entitlement are involved, continuous (periodic) advertisements in both the local and the trade press are likely to be needed. This project rapidly used its budget allocation in the final half of the pilot period. However, given the small numbers involved, a comparison of its potential for volume capacity with other Skill Choice initiatives is not feasible.

4.6 Contribution issues

A central purpose of the project was to test the willingness (and ability) of individuals and employers to pay for guidance and assessment services, particularly where a range of options could be selected and/or integrated to meet individual needs.

All the services apart from an initial guidance session were paid for at the point of delivery. It became clear very early that a 30 minute free screening service was necessary to help women select the most appropriate service for their own individual needs. Additional free guidance was also provided within the APL service itself. APLACS has advised that the APL route usually requires considerably more time prior to commitment in order to assess the suitability of a client in terms of motivation but also to assess the appropriate vocational area and level.

Employers, on the other hand, were approached by the Research Unit itself though both the RAN co-ordinator and the TEC's manager for NVQs assisted in this process. Meetings with employers were essential and often required a series of individual discussions about the project before commitment.

Each service was identified in terms of a £30 contribution (ie, 30% contribution). APL required multiples of units (generally, six to ten). Because the services required contributions, considerable care was taken to ensure that no service offered was already available free of charge to the client group. For this reason, computer aided guidance was withdrawn as a 'stand alone' chargeable service because it can be accessed free of charge at some locations in

the region.

Costing and pricing is very problematic in both the guidance and in the APL fields. We found only two providers in the region whose interviewed managers evidenced a clear organisational analysis of costing. The consequence of this across the services is that pricing of both the various guidance activities and of APL support, assessment, and verification are in a period of relative instability. This is entirely consistent across public sector services which are either new or are being cost assessed for the first time. It is likely to take some time for the situation to settle.

It emerged, for example, that in the most responsive services, individual staff commitment to client need was on occasion well beyond personal contract agreements and salaries. For the smaller organisations, particularly, this meant that staff were working very hard to accommodate demand and were quite prepared to meet women in the evenings, on the weekends, in each others' homes, and to provide home telephone support. As demand rises (eg, for APL) the question of supply capacity will become increasingly pressing. Some of this demand is likely to be absorbed as new actors enter the field, particularly the FE sector. One outcome of the project, for example, has been enhanced support links between Norfolk College (on the north coast) and Lowestoft College (on the Suffolk coast) with both WEETU and APLACS.

However, problems around costing and pricing within service provision itself have the knock-on effect of making it additionally difficult to make cost benefit analyses of individual involvement in guidance and assessment activities (see NICEC, 1992).

4.7 Charging individuals for services

Research by AZTEC in November 1993 indicated that over half the respondents in a survey of 1,000 people were willing to pay for guidance services. The survey was based on a

selection of seven services. However, these findings need to be considered within the context of the survey. All the people questioned were in paid employment; worked 16 or more hours a week; or were involved in at least 20 hours voluntary work a week. Only 14.2% were in part-time work (less than 16 hours a week) a sector with 88% female participation and high likelihood of low pay.

The sample also reflected the high skill base of the area and the relatively high incomes associated with the area. 20% of the sample earned £16,000 - £20,000 a year and a further 40% earned £21,000 or more a year. Although over half indicated that they were willing to pay for services, over a third of these were not doing so. The proportion who were varied from 38.8% to 48.7%. For six of the seven services the fee people were most prepared to pay was £50. The survey also indicated that men and those on high incomes were prepared to pay more for services than women and low earners. Similarly the former two groups were more willing to take out a loan to pay for the services.

These considerations suggest that the survey findings apply only, or largely, to employed people and the sub-set analyses suggest that those in low paid work and/or women are the least likely to be willing to pay for guidance services.

Fifteen TECs/LECs have been providing subsidised services to individuals and/or employers within the Skill Choice initiative. Some reported to us experiencing difficulties in attracting **individual service users** in the numbers originally targeted. Nevertheless, the pattern of accelerating take up appears to be occurring across most initiatives with evidence of demand exceeding targets by mid 1994. This would include people who are employer funded. As the project in Norfolk and Waveney is heavily research focused, it has been possible to evaluate the issue of charging for guidance services from a number of angles.

Common sense would suggest that people who are in full-time employment; those with higher

paid jobs and/or another source of income (eg, employed partner); or those supported by their employer will be more likely to be able to share the cost of career guidance and/or APL. Those in low paid work; part-time work; the economically inactive; or unemployed, particularly when a partner is in the same position, are unlikely to be able to contribute or will do so in far fewer numbers. In general terms, this is borne out by the experience of this project but the above is a severe over-simplification.

Clients of the project included women right across the spectrum from those who found it easy to pay, to those for whom it was a struggle, to those who could not afford to use the services at all. Even those who were seemingly best positioned to meet the cost of the services were careful about how they spent money on themselves, a frequently noted pattern in women's relationship to personal financial management. (See McGivney, 1993).

For example, within this project Janet (case study 5.1) is a solicitor and she found it quite easy to pay for one unit of service out of her part-time pay which is also the main household income. Nevertheless, she commented that if it had been £300 (eg, a *subsidised* APL route) she would have thought twice about spending that much on herself.

Angela (case study 5.5) also used money from her part-time job to pay for two units of service. Although it was not a problem to find the money, she did comment that it was a large chunk out of her pay.

Clare (case study 5.4) used money from her new, again part-time, job to pay for one unit of service but that money was also taken from the household budget.

Susan (case study 5.3), a registered unemployed woman on an Adult Training Course, found it very difficult to find the money for one unit of personal guidance but felt the value of this kind of support was worth the investment.

Sarah (case study 6.2) who is in part-time work simply could not afford £30 and claimed that for this reason she did not use the project.

I would be prepared to pay £30 for the whole package, but women on no wage or a low wage cannot afford to pay £30 for career guidance.

The same was true for Denise (case study 6.3) who was also on a low wage when interviewed. She had few qualifications and felt some discrimination in the project as registered unemployed people are eligible for free guidance and training that is not available to her. Women are often not able to register as unemployed because they have not been in the position to pay national insurance during the qualifying period.

It was particularly difficult for some women to finance APL, even with subsidy, as it generally involved multiple units of £30 each and the total amount of money could be high. Some women, however, were very determined to gain the qualifications available through APL despite the cost because of the support. It is important here to note that **APL without subsidy** can actually be prohibitively expensive. A two-thirds subsidy is a high level of financial support.

Marie (case study 5.2), a single parent who does 4 hours paid work a week and is on income support, purchased one unit of subsidised APL and was prepared to pay for up to three units of service during the relatively short duration of the project. It was only when she learned that 6 - 8 units of service at £30 each were necessary for a full NVQ that she felt unable to manage the investment. She commented that,

There is no way you can do it if you work part-time, are on income support, and a one parent family. I could only have done it if my employer had paid.

Reluctance amongst part-time workers to approach their employers for support emerged as a common pattern. There is some question

consistent with employers' actual willingness to assist their part-time workers.

In Marie's case, however, her advisor was able to find an alternative government funded training scheme that will provide her with a recognised qualification.

Other women, financing the subsidised APL out of their own resources, asked to pay in instalments. This was only possible on a short term basis within the duration of the project. However, it is evident from the findings of the pilot that in a permanent Skill Choice approach women would return for successive "bites" of service provision from an integrated model of the kind under test. Such a pattern was already emerging before the pilot closed. This was the case with both APL and with the other guidance based services. **Some women were moving between options as the original design had anticipated.**

The APL advisors recognised the importance of assessing how many units of service were required as quickly as possible, but this was not always possible. In addition, the initial assessment within APL is always subject to review as the work progresses. This can cause difficulties for the individual concerned and lead to feelings of anxiety about increasing costs. Where employers make the contribution, such anxieties release the women to concentrate solely on gaining the qualification. There are strong arguments for employer investment.

Women managers, in contrast to peripheral workers, had no difficulty in obtaining funds from their employers, particularly for MCI (see Lois, case study 7.6).

In contrast, Marie (case study 5.2) did not feel able to approach her employer. As she put it,

If you have been in a job for four years and your employer is satisfied with what you do why do they need you to have an NVQ to prove you can do the job?

feelings of many women, who are in part-time jobs. They can find it difficult to approach their employers. It may also apply to many people in full-time employment both men and women.

One woman who was working only part-time for the health service approached her manager for funding support to pursue an NVQ through APL. She was informed that there was no way that they would fund "that sort of thing" and she would have to pay for it herself. She therefore selected psychometric testing and group guidance as these were time limited and cheaper than the APL route. The attitude of her employer was the last contributory factor which led her to hand in her notice. She used money earned while working to fund the psychometric testing and group guidance which she then felt could provide her with tools to decide her future career direction.

In four cases, however, once the individual woman had demonstrated her personal commitment to paying for APL, her employer was then willing to make a contribution.

For many people, asking an employer to pay is not an option. Further research is needed to test employer commitment, particularly amongst SMEs. None of the APL services offered through the project are available free of charge, even to the registered unemployed, except through individual ESF projects. As a basic premise of equity, **there is a need to incorporate APL into current government funded 'training' options for the registered unemployed.**

4.8 Charging employers for services

A number of women did not need to initiate discussions with their employers to obtain the organisation's agreement to pay for subsidised services. The decision was either taken by the employers or arose out of employer initiated discussions with individual women workers.

In one case, Lois (see case study 7.6), a senior health service manager, had already obtained

annual self development or training. She had decision making control over that budget and used her staff development allocation to purchase units of APL support for a full MCI level 5 NVQ.

In the case of a senior schoolteacher (see Anne's case study, 7.2) the impetus to use the project arose out of her staff appraisal. As a non-graduate trained teacher seeking deputy headship posts, APL support for an MCI level 4 NVQ proved to be a valuable qualification route to support her personal career development. The school was pleased to make the necessary contributions.

In the case of Gail (case study 7.1), the impetus came from organisational restructuring which caused her redundancy. Her employers were also happy to contribute to APL support. In this case, RAN played an important role in alerting the organisation to the project's services.

One of the participating guidance agencies made use of the project's subsidised support itself in order to offer an APL route to NVQs in Business Administration for its receptionists. Some of these individual staff had already had discussions with their managers asking that they receive training on a par with the training already being offered to the core guidance workers and their managers. The project provided the employer an immediate opportunity to meet the needs of these support staff (see case studies 7.7 - 7.11).

Two guidance workers themselves were also able to gain employer support for group guidance using the organisation's normal training request system.

The experience of the project indicates that employers are more likely to invest in services of this kind if:

- there is a staff appraisal system in place
- the employer has, or is working

- the employer has a strategy for staff development with clear objectives, priorities, and targets
- the employer is experiencing major structural changes (eg, redundancy or reorganisation).

Where this particular project was concerned, employers who either had management policies sympathetic to women workers (nb, peripheral workers and/or support staff) and/or a largely female workforce tended to be more sympathetic to funding employees. These included employers who did not participate for various reasons (see Section 8).

4.9 Quality assurance

All provider bodies within the project had targets in place for advisor staff development. All advisors have the minimum RSA Certificate and many hold the RSA Diploma in Educational Guidance. The Careers Service ensures that all its advisors hold the Diploma in Careers Guidance. APLACS advisors all hold TDLB D36 qualifications. National standards for guidance workers are not yet in place (The newly launched NACCEG (National Advisory Council for Careers on Educational Guidance) has assumed the central quality brief.

This evaluation did not include examination of the internal management and delivery systems of participating delivery bodies. Quality assurance assessments were based entirely on client perspective and Research Unit monitoring. Baselines for service quality included:

- immediate response to client enquiries
- service provision offered to client within seven days
- ensured appropriateness of service to client need (timing, location, choice)

- entitlements by end July 1994
- geographic distribution to include all of Norfolk and Waveney
- client satisfaction with services (including advisory support in moving between options).

These baselines were satisfactorily met. The exceptions to this were those few services within the model that providers were unable to deliver (see 4.10).

Benchmarks for improvement are problematic because the project was time limited and there is no assurance that the model will continue. In fact, findings arising from the project suggest that **the integrated model has been effective in the following ways:**

- It has helped to raise awareness of both guidance and assessment services amongst some adults.
- It has proved to be sufficiently flexible to meet individual and employer needs (ie, given the market segment under test).
- It has stimulated some new product development amongst some providers.
- It has made movement between provider services easier for clients using the model.

However, the following recommendations are crucial if the model is to continue:

- A single co-ordinating body is recommended and it should not be a direct delivery body (see 4.1).
- The concept of **integrated services** needs to be embedded within the area's guidance network for both men and women.
- A charging system for guidance services must a) ensure that these services have **additionality** and b) not bar access to individuals who cannot afford contributions.
- A subsidy support for the APL route

potential clients who could not otherwise gain these qualifications.

4.10 Take up of services

There was considerable response to the initial media publicity. In the first few weeks more than 160 Information Packs were sent direct to individual women who requested further details. Additional Packs were also distributed via the service providers. Initial take-up, however, was slow. Tables 1 and 2 show the sale of units by month and the cumulative monthly totals. Figures 3 and 4 also show this graphically. Three months into the project only a third of the 267 target units (93) had been sold. The take up was initially slow by both individual women and employers. From May onward, however, the demand accelerated rapidly. By the end of the July 277 units had been sold (10 more than the initial target of 267). Three companies and a further 34 women requested use of the services in the first week of August alone after the subsidy had been discontinued. **There is strong evidence that the project could accelerate rapidly with further government funding.**

Tables 1 and 2 as well as Figures 3 and 4 indicate the patterns of service take-up over the whole period of the project. The following findings are of particular relevance:

- Self funding women grew at a steady rate with a sudden jump in August. This latter increase was a consequence of women in July seeking to use the subsidy during the autumn. (Their contributions were received during the early days of August but were requested end July).
- The employer funding pattern indicates the relatively long lead time required before employers made firm decisions.
- An employer led demand in August resulted in requests for some 170

service after the subsidy budget had been exhausted.

Overall, the project had 'settled' and had begun to enter the landscape of known services late in the pilot period. Projections suggest that this was in fact, the take off point. Both providers, and potential clients appeared to be internalising the value of the model. That this should occur in August, the least likely month for activity, suggests the urgency of demand. The research team had made it widely known that end July would be the project closure date.

Sale of units by month

No. of Units sold each month			
Month	Self funded	Employer funded	TOTAL
March	3	11	14
April	4	52	56
May	13	10	23
June	20	9	29
July	12	113	125
August	24	6	30
TOTAL	76	201	277

Table 1

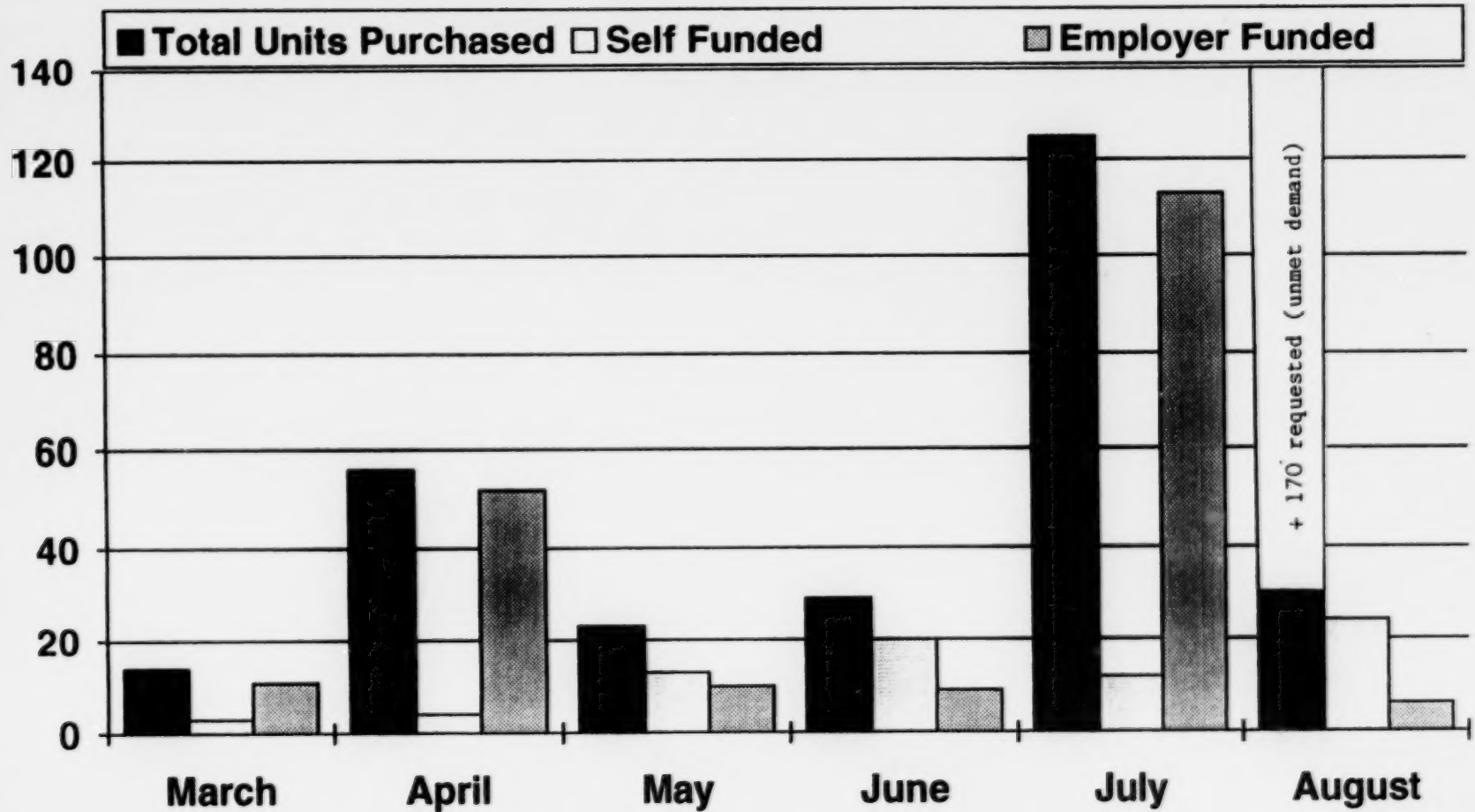
Sale of Units - cumulative monthly total

No. of Units sold - cumulative monthly total			
Month	Self funded	Employer funded	TOTAL
March	3	11	14
April	7	63	70
May	20	73	93
June	44	78	122
July	56	191	247
August	80	197	277
TOTAL	80	187	277

Table 2

Pattern of Service Take Up

33

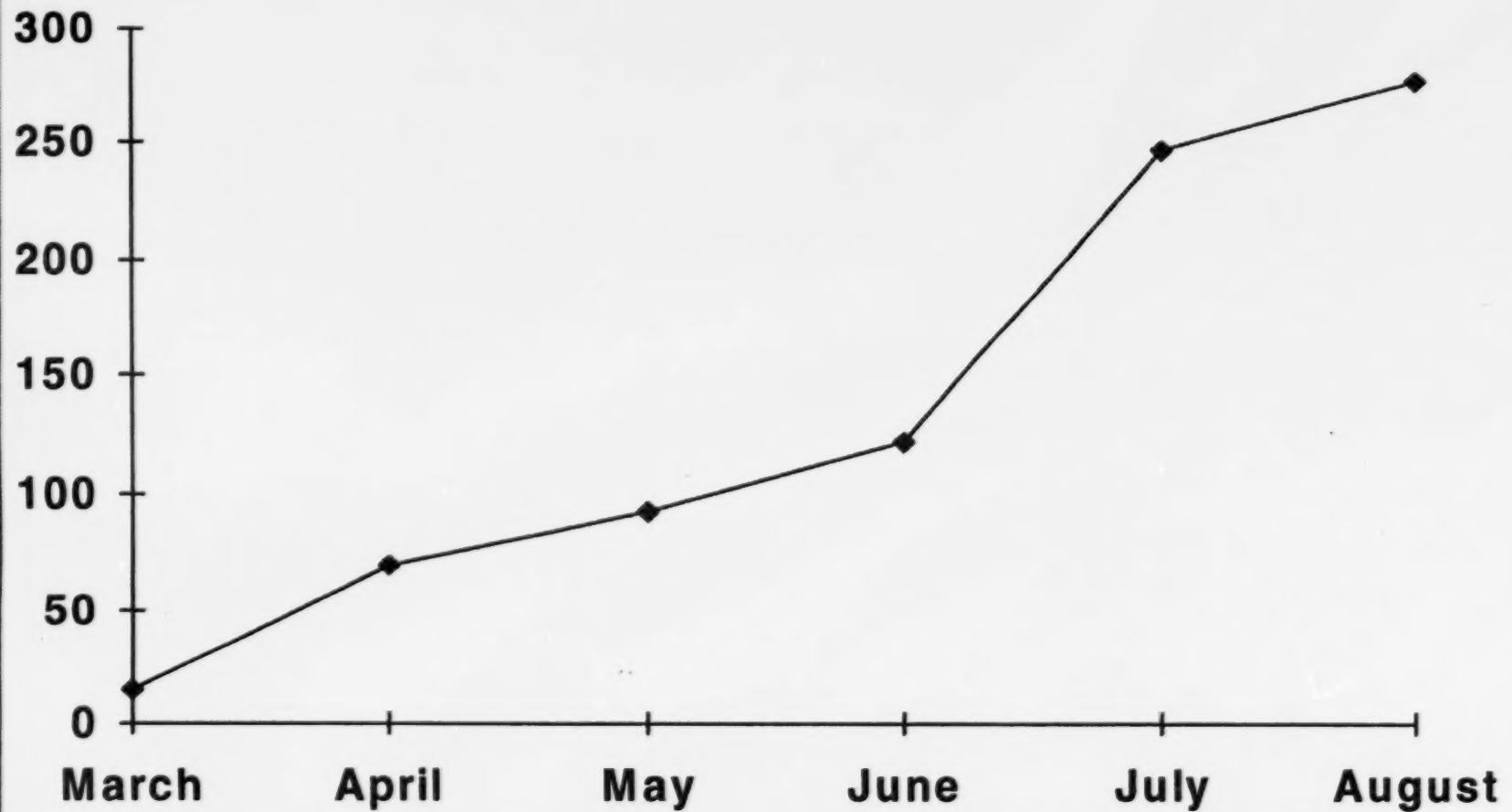


41

Figure 3

40

Total Units Sold



4.11 Profiles of service use

Tables 3 through 5 illustrate the pattern of service take up by contribution pattern; by profile of service selected; and by service provider selected. A total of 105 women used the services and 8 of these used more than one service (see Table 3). If the APL services are counted as only one service, a total of 113 services were used by 105 women. 56% of these were self funded (63 women) and 41% were employer funded (46 women). 3% were jointly funded by the woman and her employer (4 women).

In other words, of the total number of women using the project, **more individual clients were self funded than employer funded.** On the other hand, when measured by investment, **employers purchased more units of service in total compared with self funding individuals as a group.**

The most popular guidance service amongst self funding women was group guidance (38 women, 60% of self funded services). This was followed by psychometric testing (10 women) and personal guidance (10 women). 76% of the services purchased by employers were for APL (35 women). Job shadowing proved difficult to arrange and was only used by one woman though job shadowing, mentoring, and employee volunteering were areas of potential development given the evidence derived from requests and enquiries.

Table 4 details the number of units purchased for each service. 74% of all the units were used to purchase APL services (206 units). In terms of units of service, employers purchased 73% of all the total services (201 units) and individual women purchased 27% (76 units). 90% of employer purchases were for APL support (190 units).

The main service providers were APLACS (see Table 5) and WEETU. APLACS was the only contracted APL provider within the project. It delivered services to 36% of the individual clients (41 women) and provided 69% of the

service (192 units). The other two major service providers were WEETU (57 women and units of service), and the School of Management, Finance & Education at City College Norwich (12 women and units of service). Lowestoft College, Norfolk Careers Service and the CDCs provided services to only one woman each. These patterns were a consequence of client need and choice.

Women's use of services

Type of Service	No of Women			
	Self Financed	Employer Financed	Jointly Financed	TOTAL
APL	3	35	4	42
Group Guidance	38	8	-	46
Psychometric Testing	10	2	-	12
Personal Guidance	10	1	-	11
Job Shadowing	1	-	-	1
O U Study Pack	1	-	-	1
TOTAL	63	46	4	113*

Table 3

*105 separate women used the services. Eight used more than one service as follows:

- 3 women: group guidance and psychometric testing
- 3 women: psychometric testing and personal guidance
- 2 women: APL and group guidance

Number of units used for each service

Type of Service	Number of Units Purchased		
	By Woman	By Employer	TOTAL
APL	16	190	206
Group Guidance	38	8	46
Psychometric Testing	10	2	12
Personal Guidance	10	1	11
Job Shadowing	1	-	1
O U Study Pack	1	-	1
TOTAL	76	201	277

Table 4

Service Providers by number of women and units

Service Providers	Service Provision	
	Number of Women	Number of Units Used
APLACS	41	192
WEETU	57	57
School of Management, Finance & Education	12	12
Lowestoft College	1	14
Norfolk Careers Service	1	1
CDCs	1	1
TOTAL	113*	277

Table 5

*105 separate women used the services, eight of whom used more than one service.

4.12 Geographic distribution

Monitoring information was available at the time of writing for 47 of the self funded women (see Table 6). Rurality was a central concern at the outset of the project yet the figures reveal that 38% of the self funding women were from rural areas (19 women). Only 11 were from Norwich with another 11 from towns in Norfolk and Waveney. Information is still coming into the Research Unit from providers as women complete their service entitlement but research data and projections suggest that this pattern of rural take-up is indicative of the full cohort.

The employer funded women were predominantly based in Norwich or the towns across the region (see Table 7). Only one woman worked in a rural area. We would expect this pattern given company locations. Six women were from outside Norfolk and Waveney as they work for an employer based in Norwich with branches across East Anglia.

Geographical location of self funded women

Location	No of women
Norwich	11
Norwich suburbs	7
Other town	11
Rural area	18
TOTAL	47

Table 6

Note: Information based on home address.

Geographical location of employer funded women

Location	No. of women
Norwich	16
Norwich suburbs	-
Other town	18
Rural area	1
Outside Norfolk & Waveney	6
TOTAL	41

Table 7

Note: Information based on employers, address

4.13 Sources of initial information about the project

Most women who actually used the services reported that they had heard about the project through either the press or City College. The City College routes were via the Access Centre; the Research Unit; the College 'Return to Learn' Open Evening; and the college's women's development programmes (New Opportunities for Women or Women in Management).

Press sources included press and radio interviews by the Research Unit and occurred in the early stages of the project. WEETU placed block newspaper adverts at mid point in the project and invited local women to a lunch time launch of its own services during May. WEETU also developed an Information Pack for its own services particularly targeted at women in middle management positions.

4.14 Service user monitoring

At the time of writing this report, 67 of 105 self monitoring forms had been returned to the Research Unit. These were from:

- 41 self funded women
- 21 employer funded women
- 4 jointly funded women.

This sample includes users of all of the services provided within the 277 unit allocation. Tables 9 and 10 below provide details about these 66 women.

The user group has been predominantly over the age of 35 (73%). This is likely to reflect the particular need for both guidance and assessment services amongst women who have had a break in career. It is important to note that the marketing did not target women within any age range or within any particular occupational sector. An early decision was also taken to ensure that no woman of any age over 16 was barred from participation. It would appear that the experience of the pilot confirms, despite the small sample, a particular need for career information and advice amongst women

in their middle years.

Employer funded women were, on average, a little younger (67% were over the age of 35). Amongst the self funding women, a striking 43% were over the age of 45. There is considerable evidence that large numbers of working women, however defined (see 1.4), evidence high levels of individual commitment to career development including commitment to learning (*pace* APL). This group of actual and potential workers are likely to be free of early years childcare responsibilities but may still have significant domestic commitments including eldercare (see examples within the case studies). Amongst these women, there was also evidence of workplace change acting as key motivators. These include:

- redundancy or reorganisation of work
- under-use of skills and experience on return to work after a break (in some cases, working at less than potential over a period of some years)
- desire for promotion or career change
- dissatisfaction with current employer
- desire for 'training' and/or qualifications (nb, amongst peripheral workers such as part-time; support staff; and/or fixed term contract workers)
- need for help in job search, CV, and/or interview skills
- need for career development support amongst self employed workers (see childcare workers who emerged after project closure, 4.16).

Most women (72%) within this monitored sample were employed. Just over half were in

part-time work. Amongst the self funded women, 55% were in waged employment, slightly more than half of these in part-time jobs. These figures need to be treated with caution because the sample size is small. Nevertheless, there are indicators of some value:

- Individual commitment can be high (measured in willingness to contribute financially to guidance and assessment services) even amongst part-time workers who are generally on low pay.
- Childcare is an important factor in supporting women workers (actual and potential). Nevertheless, it must not be viewed as a single simple solution given the economic activity and aspirations of older workers.
- Even where women have older children their domestic responsibilities continue and their needs for highly flexible service delivery were apparent throughout the project. A significant number did not have primary access to personal transport.

Ethnicity was also monitored through the (anonymous) self completion forms. One woman was of Asian origin while the remainder declared themselves "White". This is a crude measure but it indicates that there was a need for this project to link into the Norwich Council for Racial Equality (CRE). This did not formally occur and was a weakness in implementation. Despite myths to the contrary, the Norfolk and Waveney area has active ethnic minority communities. Women in these communities need targeted information and advice on both VET opportunities and on guidance and assessment services. At present, their needs are only being addressed directly by the local authority Adult Education (and ABE) services.

Four of the 67 self monitoring forms were

returned by women who declared "a disability that limited the amount or kind of work they were able to do". This is a relatively neglected group of women across the region. However, the TEC funded One to One, Partners for Progress initiative has played a key employment guidance and advocacy role (including access to VET) for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities since July 1992. Resource and administration pressures on this initiative made it difficult for the organisation to be involved in the project. Skill Choice initiatives could have a valuable role to play in providing support for these (actual and potential) workers.

A particular case of unmet need arose during the project for women working in the child care sector who wished to gain qualifications. This included both self employed women (childminders) and women working for voluntary organisations (playgroups). They were unable to afford the cost of APL (see case study 4.16).

All women who contributed personally to APL services were notified by the Research Unit that they were eligible for tax relief on contributions. Only one woman asked for the relevant tax forms.

How heard about the project

How heard about the project	Source of finding			TOTAL
	Self funded	Employer funded	Jointly funded	
Press	13	2	2	17
Radio	2	-	-	2
City College	14	2	-	16
Service Providers	9	6	2	17
Employer	1	11	-	12
Friend/Family	1	-	-	1
Other	2	-	-	2
TOTAL	42	21	4	67

Table 8

Age groups

Source of funding				
Age Group	Self funded	Employer funded	Jointly funded	TOTAL
19 - 25 years	2	2	1	5
26 - 35 years	7	5	1	13
36 - 45 years	15	10	-	25
46 - 55 years	17	4	2	23
56 - 65 years	1	-	-	1
TOTAL	42	21	4	67

Table 9

Employment status

Source of funding				
Employment Status	Self funded	Employer funded	Jointly funded	TOTAL
Full-time	10	10	2	22
Part-time	13	11	2	26
Self-employed	6	-	-	6
Registered Unemployed	6	-	-	6
Other	7	-	-	7
TOTAL	42	21	4	67

Table 10

Research staff contacted 43 women by telephone to find out why they had not taken up the services in the project after requesting further information. The research team wished to assess women's responses to project marketing and publicity; the women's perceptions of service relevance to their personal needs; and the women's responses to paying for guidance and assessment services (albeit not at full cost).

28 of the women who were contacted had responded directly to media publicity about the project, ten after hearing a radio broadcast and 14 after reading a feature in the local press. Two heard about the project from a friend and one was referred by the Access Centre at City College. All but one of these 28 women had received the Information Pack.

The remaining 15 women contacted were a sample of those who were given Information Packs at a 'Return to Learn' Opening Evening at City College. One had already heard of the project through a friend.

The women's reasons for requesting more information were:

- 10 wished to return to work after a career break.
- 7 wished to change career direction.
- 16 wanted to improve their skills through training.
- 11 wanted to gain qualifications for the skills and experience they already held.
- 8 were curious and/or wanted to broaden their horizons.
- 6 had other reasons.

Eight women reported more than one reason for applying for further information.

Recent research by Norfolk and Waveney TEC (not linked to this project) found that where guidance is concerned, adults prefer to be given an Information Pack *before* making a decision

about whether to attend a service in person. These findings emerged after the project had begun but they emphasised the need to evaluate the marketing information sent to clients. Research staff asked the women under survey what they thought of the project's Information Pack. The following include some multiple responses:

22 felt the pack was either 'very good' or 'good'.

8 specifically commented that the pack was clear and well presented.

3 felt the pack was useful.

5 found it difficult to understand.

8 said the pack was not what they expected.

4 had not read the information.

Twenty of the women (about half) had thoughts about how and whether the Information Pack could be improved. Three said no improvements were necessary while seven made a suggestion.

Two women suggested a summary of the services at the beginning of the pack. One woman thought the pack was too one sided,

It should take account of women who have skills but no qualifications. The services described were more appropriate to women already in work.

Yet another woman said the opposite,

It is mainly aimed at women out of jobs.

We found that these oppositional readings of the project information occurred throughout the project. In fact, **users** tended to feel that the services had been designed specifically to meet their needs and would not be appropriate for other women. This was the case amongst highly qualified women, women in full-time work, women in senior posts, women in part-time work, the economically inactive, and those with few or no qualifications.

In essence, this meant that, on the whole, the model had sufficient suppleness to meet the full

range of need. The initial difficulty occurs thereby at the point of first marketing. If non-users believed the services were for 'other women', then the project information needed adjustment. The direct parallel is to be found in any marketing of education and training.

There was also a need to know if women understood from the Information Pack what they needed to do next if they wanted to explore or access the service. Only sixteen were clear though a further sixteen had not looked at the information closely enough to be certain one way or the other.

16 women said "Yes".

4 women said "Not really".

6 women said "No".

16 women had not comment.

When queried about service relevance to their needs, 21 responded positively but three of these could not afford the financial contribution. When prompted more specifically about paying for services, 18 said that cost either was or could be a problem. The implication was that the services must be needed; perceived relevant to the woman's immediate circumstances; and easy to access. Such were the responses of women who had not taken up the services after asking for an Information Pack.

Amongst the survey sample of non users, 21 were in waged work. Of those who said that cost was a barrier, four were in paid work and two in unpaid work. Of those who thought money might be a problem, seven were in paid work and five in unwaged work.

23 women, at their own request, were provided with more information about initial guidance and the services available within the project during the telephone survey. Two of these women subsequently inquired further. One invested in individual guidance and the other attended a WEETU screening session to decide on a service. When last contacted, she was still undecided.

4.16.1 Tracking

At the close of the project in late June/early July, the research team tracked a random sample of participating women for follow-up monitoring. Ideally, such spot checks should occur at regular intervals over a longer period and be matched with a control group of non-participants.

A sample of 37 women were contacted by telephone to find out what action, if any, they had taken since receiving services through the project.

The sample was drawn from women using the following services:

The above sample includes 8 women who used more than one service. The numbers of additional services used are shown in brackets. The pattern was as follows: two women who undertook group guidance went on to do psychometric testing as well; three women attended group guidance after they had completed either psychometric testing, one to one guidance or APL; and three people are currently receiving one to one guidance after psychometric testing.

This pattern of opportunity to move freely between services was at the heart of the original concept of the model. We found sufficient evidence to suggest that this is the way some women will respond to that opportunity. The pattern of choice also reinforces the widespread agreement amongst providers that a project co-ordinator is necessary who is also not involved in direct delivery of the services.

Of the six women in the sample using APL, three were still working on their portfolios. One had submitted hers for assessment and the remaining two did not continue beyond the introductory stage. Of the remaining 31 women, some had only just finished receiving their service prior to this report going to press and

two were still using the services.

13 of the 37 women contacted are included in the case studies.

4.16.2 Findings

Of the 37 women sampled, 22 (61%) reported that they had been involved in some form of education or training during the previous three year period (see Table 11). This level of commitment to learning is generally in line with the most recent national profile (61% according to SCPR, July 1994).

Of those who had not been involved in learning, the project appears to have been attractive as a motivating first step and, despite the small numbers, does suggest **the value of the model itself in stimulating individual commitment.**

Despite the short time period of time the project operated, most women were also taking practical action to further their careers (see Tables 12 through 14).

Training: nine women were interested in training (see Tables 12 and 13) Eleven had applied for courses and four were already involved in VET. Programmes varied from short vocational courses to long award bearing qualifications, including an MA in Social Work. Table 13 indicates the range of planned education/training amongst this sample.

Twenty of the 37 women in the sample were active in the training/education market at the end of June 1994.

Employment: Eleven women were investigating job change or promotion within their own organisations and ten had actually made applications (see Table 14). One woman who had participated in group guidance commented,

I used to just look at the job adverts, now I'm actually applying for them.

Seven had obtained a new job. Four of these were short term posts (ie, less than 6 months) but three were longer term jobs. One of the three in the process of APL who had also participated in group guidance had been promoted from Company Secretary to a senior management post within her firm, a hydraulics company.

In total, 22 of the 37 women were active in the job market.

Voluntary work: Three of the women were active in voluntary work (see Table 4). One was considering advice work for the local Council for Racial Equality in response to personal aptitudes and qualities that had been highlighted by her psychometric tests.

The remaining two women had applied for voluntary work. One wanted to be involved in voluntary social work to test her commitment to this vocational area before finally taking up an offer to do an MA in Social Work. The third woman had been interviewed for a position as a CAB advisor. She felt that this work experience would give her purpose and direction and would look good on her CV when she applies for jobs.

Five women were still receiving services through the project. In all, only 8 of the 37 women (22%) were not taking any action immediately after their use of the guidance and assessment services. It is impossible to directly credit the project itself with this high activity rate as no pre-entry motivation assessment was used in the research. Nevertheless, it is likely that the project, at the very least, accelerated individual commitment to the learning system.

Education or Training in previous 3 years (follow up sample)

	No	%
Yes	22	60
No	12	32
Not Known	3	8
TOTAL	37	100

Table 11

VET outcomes at mid July 1994

Sample base: 37 women	
Still receiving service	5
No action yet	8
VET Outcomes	
Considering a training/education course	9
Applied for a training/education course	11
Doing or recently completed training/education course	4
Total women active in pursuing training/education possibilities	20

Table 12

Types of VET commitment amongst follow-up sample (mid July 1994)

Under consideration	
Access Course, Open University or University Course	
MA in Research Methods	
Access Course or Institute of Legal Executives Secretarial Course	
Advanced Careers guidance and/or Counselling Skills	
Staff Development	
Health and Education	
Computing and updating French skills/awareness	
Word processing (2 people)	
Furniture making	
Massage or Ceramics	
Applied For	
MA in Social Work	
MA in the Sociology and Anthropology of Travel and Tourism	
Institute of Legal Executives Secretarial Course	
RSA in Education and Training Guidance	
GCSE in photography	
Industrial Society Project Management Course	
Adult Training word processing course (2 people)	
Short course on running your own business (Norwich Enterprise Agency Trust)	
In progress/finished completed	
RSA Level 2 Business Administration Information Processing	
Short course for women managers	
Word Processing	
Art course	

Table 13

Economic activity profiles at mid July 1994

Employment Outcomes	
Considering applying for a new job/or a promotion	11
Actively applying for new job/promotion	10
Obtained new job/promotion	
short term (less than 6 months)	4
long term (more than 6 months)	3
Total women active in the job market	22
Voluntary Work	
Considering doing voluntary work	1
Applied to do voluntary work	2
Total women active in voluntary work	3

Table 14

4.17 Recommendation for project co-ordination: Case study of RAN - Redundancy Advice Network

RAN holds a regional brief for representing roughly twenty guidance and advice services across Norfolk and Waveney in providing adults with guidance when they face redundancy. It is currently hoping to expand its activities into 'whole workforce services' as an umbrella representative of local and regional advice providers.

The history of RAN began with the closure of a Norwich clothing factory in 1989 and loss of 100+ jobs. This event triggered the creation of a Redundancy Task Force by the City Council. An announcement in the press had drawn more than ten separate organisations offering workforce assistance to the Company's Personnel Officer on a single day. The Council thus took the lead in setting up a co-ordinating facility to provide comprehensive redundancy packages on company premises before employees leave. The intention was to assist both firms declaring job losses and their affected staff.

The Task Force became the Redundancy Advice Network (RAN) in 1990 and now covers the whole of Norfolk and Waveney. The co-ordinating function is based in Norwich. Since its inception, RAN has assisted some 2,000 individuals facing redundancy and more than forty organisations have been helped including Norwich Union, British Sugar, Baxter Healthcare, Norfolk Fire Service and Eastern Electricity as well as small firms facing liquidation.

RAN is a unique network of public and voluntary sector organisations which offers guidance on welfare rights, employment, training and career issues. It co-ordinates the work of network members which now number in excess of 20. All network members deliver tailored advice and information programmes **free to employees** in the workplace but employers make financial contributions to RAN if they can. Network members include,

among others: APLACS, the Benefits Agency, the Citizens Advice Bureau, Adult Basic Education, Adult Education, Norfolk Careers Service, Norwich City College Access Centre, Norwich and District Voluntary Services, the Open University, and WEETU.

RAN assists employers in identifying departing employee needs and then develops a programme which usually covers four key areas: eligibility for welfare benefits; careers guidance; job search skills; and training/retraining. These core areas can be supplemented by advice on self employment; alternatives to paid work; stress management; and family finances. Advice is given on a one to one basis, in group presentations, or in workshops.

The RAN services are free to the individual and the cost to employers is minimal because RAN has non-profit making and charitable status. Network members' services are charged to RAN at cost and some choose not to charge at all. RAN's co-ordinating fee is flexible to ensure all employees have equal access to advice and it recovers members' fees (where applicable) through employer donations.

RAN's support benefits employers in several ways: it enables employers to care for their staff; it is an independent service provided by a wide range of diverse expert advisors; it gives a prompt response to employer and employee needs; it provides a full co-ordinating and support role for a company's personnel staff; and the minimal charges help to secure advice and information for all employees. In addition, by using the network approach, appropriate advisors can be called on to deliver each specialist area of a programme. Perhaps the most important benefit is that RAN offers a focus informed by local expertise to meet local specified needs.

RAN is highly regarded but its success did not happen overnight nor without problems to be solved along the way. Considerable development time has been invested in establishing the infrastructure and in creating awareness of the service. For example, it took

employers a considerable length of time to realise what RAN could offer but its reputation has gradually broadened over the last four years. Employers now contact RAN for assistance in advance of redundancies. In the past RAN contacted companies who announced workforce reductions in order to explain the assistance on offer.

RAN reports that when it first contacts a company, roughly 90% of those who agree to a face to face meeting will eventually use the services. In contrast, those who only want information sent to them rarely make use of the services. Some companies respond instantly to RAN's offers while others require a longer lead time.

In addition, the organisation has gone through several transformations but over a period of five years has now gained the confidence of its network providers.

RAN's reputation now extends beyond the Norfolk & Waveney area and its current co-ordinator has assisted in the development of one-off projects in other regions.

A particular feature of the RAN network is that it has been able to respond to employer needs. It is flexible enough to be demand led. RAN originally organised programmes of workshops, presentations and one to one sessions run by different agencies on different days. In response to employer requests, it now also organises "Advice seminars" in the workplace that are attended by several agencies concurrently. Typically, the participating agencies set up displays and provide an advisor to explain the services on offer. Employees thus have an opportunity to find out about all local services and to talk to advisors on a single day, all on the same premises. RAN also assists employers in setting up Job Search Rooms on site.

Building on the success of the RAN model, a feasibility study is currently being undertaken to investigate the potential for setting up a separate but linked network to offer a range of Employer Welfare and Development services

available to people in work. It is envisaged that the "Workforce Services" Project will cover four key areas:

- Guidance (educational and vocational)
- Training
- Welfare of staff
- Self Development.

This potential for widening RAN's role to include workforce development is in line with NETTS and the needs identified by the R & D Skill Choice pilot for women which is the subject of this report. It became clear, as noted in 4.1 above that during the project, all providers favoured a single co-ordinating body for implementation of the model we have been testing. Furthermore, RAN's unique track record in the region and its current level of maturity in being able to work with individuals, employers, and providers has made it the organisation all providers would feel comfortable with should the Skill Choice model be extended in this region. RAN has proved itself to be employer responsive. Its services are tailored to meet the specific needs of individual companies and their employees. It is thus a natural step logistically for RAN to move into workplace development as well as redundancy services. As part of that potential, RAN will assist companies to achieve liP and could be in a position to contribute to local economic development. Much will depend on the feasibility study RAN is currently conducting to assess its ability to extend its current role.

The "Workforce Services" objective would be to use the network approach in order to facilitate transfer of good practice from the voluntary and public sector advisory services by providing employers access to a wide range of expertise. The project aims to open up new markets for cost effective services that can be delivered to sectors of the workforce where employer investment is currently low. The feasibility study is due to be completed in March 1995.

5.1 Janet

In this case, a professional woman who is also a single parent had become seriously disaffected from her part-time post. She is a solicitor seeking a career change but wanted some external assessment of her aptitudes. She undertook a battery of psychometric tests.

Janet lives in a small town with her teenage son. In her mid forties, she is the family breadwinner.

Janet decided on a legal career at the age of 15 but never received guidance on this or any other career option. After A levels she worked for a year with a solicitor before taking a law degree and doing her articles. She married but the marriage broke down leaving her with a small son to support. Janet has worked part-time for a number of local law firms since the mid 1980's.

When interviewed, she was dissatisfied with her current job and with her employer. She did not enjoy the increasingly commercial environment of the law office and felt undervalued as a part-time worker. Her employers had recently reduced both her hours and pay without consulting her yet she felt pressured to do the same quantity of work. Their decision was quite a shock. Under the circumstances she felt the need to reconsider her career options. Over the years Janet had felt professional prejudice against women who work part-time within the legal profession and this had affected her view of this occupational area.

She first heard about the project on a Radio Norfolk news bulletin and rang the Access Centre at City College for an Information Pack. She felt the Pack was aimed at women of a lower educational level than herself but was, nevertheless, interested in psychometric testing

and computer aided guidance. She was given free access to free computer aided guidance and decided to purchase the psychometric testing only. She took the tests at City College in Norwich rather than through the Careers Service in her local area. Opting for the College provision meant that she could receive the service more quickly as the Careers Service was providing tests within the project only to groups of three or more women.

Travelling into Norwich for the service was not a problem. Having a choice of time was more important as she had only one free afternoon a week. She felt it was helpful that she had the same advisor throughout but she felt this was, *not necessarily essential*. She also felt that the advisor understood her situation and was reasonably knowledgeable. Having a male advisor posed no problems. Her first session began with a visit to the advisor to decide which tests would be appropriate. 16PF(5), the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Advanced Occupational Interest Inventory (AOII) were selected. She found the tests quite demanding, especially the AOII.

She had a second session a week later to discuss the findings with her advisor. There was a high degree of agreement between the 16PF5 test and the Myer-Briggs Type Indicator. They both identified Janet as a rather introverted, shy, serious, task oriented person who is somewhat insecure and self doubting. The ideal work environment for Janet was assessed as one which would be stable and orderly and in which tasks are defined and everyone knows what is to be done, who is to do it and by when. The Advanced Occupational Interest Inventory identified four work areas that were appropriate for her: legal, financial, information and physical. All of these areas had much to recommend them.

During the feedback session a number of possible careers were considered, including work for the civil service, HMSO or local government. The possibility of doing an MSc was also explored. Janet said that nothing emerged from the report that she did not already know.

She recognised herself in the results, *They were spot on*. The possible careers that were identified were all areas that she had considered at some time in the past. She was particularly pleased that legal work was included, *It was encouraging to know that I hadn't been barking up the wrong tree for the past 20 years*.

The report did not tell her what to do next. This was left to Janet herself. When she was interviewed in mid May, she was still considering the results. Janet felt that she had a major decision to make that might involve changing her career and/or moving. Until she made this decision, she was undecided about whether she would use any of the project's other services. She felt that most of the other services were aimed at women returning to work (ie, women with few qualifications and no idea of what they can do). She felt that the service had been worth the contribution and was quite happy to pay for it. She commented that the service was, *A great boost to a rather battered morale*.

She felt it was useful that the project was for women only, *Women prefer it to be for women only because then they don't have to compete with men for places, plus it's run by women*. She also thought that there were probably men who could benefit from it as well.

Janet said that she would recommend the service to other people and had really needed this sort of guidance herself twenty years ago. She had never used any guidance or assessment services before. She had heard of the Careers Service for younger people and of WEETU, but the latter only as an acronym. She did not know what WEETU did. She had not heard of the CDCs or the Access Centre before.

She had no difficulties in using the service and was happy to travel to Norwich. The rapid appointment system which was responsive to her schedule was important. The £30 was not difficult to find.

Janet had no suggestions for improvements to the service itself. She was happy with the

Information Pack and, having read it, felt it clear what to do next. She suggested that it might have been useful to include a payment slip. She felt that the project could have been publicised more widely. She only heard of it by chance on the radio and did not see or hear any further publicity.

Overall Janet found the service very user friendly and it met her immediate guidance needs.

Outcome update

Some weeks after completing the psychometric tests Janet's employers recognised that she had attracted significant business to the firm and her hours and pay were reinstated to their former level. Janet has decided to remain with her present employers for the time being.

5.2 Marie

This is the case of a woman on income support and in low paid part-time work who has, in the past, owned and managed two businesses. Her use of APL to gain credit for her experience is a good example of the project's potential value. However, it also illustrates the difficulty for a self funding woman where the subsidy is time limited and the cost cannot thereby be spread over a longer period. The outcome in training has, however, been excellent.

Marie is in her early 40s and lives in a suburb of Norwich with her two sons. One is at College and the other at University. She had been working four hours a week in retail sales and also receiving income support. She had few qualifications but had always been in paid work apart from five years or so when her children were young.

Marie trained as a hairdresser and went on to run her own business. She was forced to give this up when the chemicals began to affect her

health. She also ran a mobile chicken and egg retailing business for a period of time. Since the children were born, she has had a variety of part time jobs, some of them working from home.

Marie first heard about the accreditation of prior learning (APL) from a television programme "Second Chance". She thought it would be useful for her son and sent off for a leaflet. *When it came I thought it would be a good idea for me.* At this stage she had heard no mention of money. She contacted her local Career Development Centre who referred her to the City College Access Centre,

I phoned City College and from then on things became confusing. No one could give me a clear idea of what it was all about. They said they could send me information. I could read it and then make a decision.

She was sent was the Information Pack about the project. She read through all of the pack (*It took a lot of reading*) and focused on the APL options. She thought she would skip the Introduction to APL (APL1) and purchase APL2 to get help with compiling a portfolio.

She contacted the Research Unit and was referred to APLACS for 30 minutes free guidance to see if APL was appropriate for her. The APLACS advisor spent two hours with her explaining APL and NVQs and identifying which NVQs would suit her.

Two NVQs were identified. Marie organises BMX cycle events at both a local and regional level and the advisor suggested that she could use this experience to obtain units of the Level 2 NVQ in Business Administration. She could use her paid work experience to work towards a Level 3 NVQ in Customer Care. The advisor gave Marie a booklet detailing all the units in the Business Administration NVQ, *It was one of the best things I got out of the meetings.* Although she had most of the experience required, she did not have the relevant experience for the sections on computer work,

payroll and reprographics. Marie also found the phrase accreditation of **prior** learning confusing as only recent or current experience could be used. She commented, *It should be renamed.* Marie looked at the requirements of the NVQ in Customer Care and found that all of the units were covered by her job, *I therefore thought I could do both NVQs.*

She realised that she could not complete all the work with only £30 of service. She thought she might need to buy as many as three units. Although this would be difficult to pay for, she decided to go ahead and pay £30 to begin APL2. At her next session, the NVQ in Customer Care was the focus of discussion with some suggestions about how she could approach her employer for help in paying for the units. The advisor informed her that it would probably cost Marie more than the equivalent of £90 (3 units of service support after subsidy). The advisor undertook to assess exactly how much support Marie would need in total. When her advisor reported by phone that 6 - 8 units of subsidised service would be needed to achieve the level 2 NVQ, Marie reported, *I felt the blood drain out of me as I stood there on the phone. I can't afford this.* At the next session she informed APLACS that she could not continue.

As soon as her advisor realised that Marie could not continue with APL, the APLACS advisors looked at alternatives. The Job Centre and the CDC were contacted to see whether any free support was available for people who work part time. The APLACS advisor also made special arrangements for Marie to have an immediate appointment at the Job Centre and the CDC advisor also offered to see Marie outside her normal office hours. As a result she was very quickly allocated to an Adult Training Scheme. She is now doing an RSA Level 2 in Business Administration Information Processing. She is enjoying the new course, *It is just what I needed* and it will provide her with a recognised qualification.

Marie felt that the best thing about the service was that *I was eventually pointed in the right direction* but she still feels that she should not

have had to pay for what she received. In all she had 6 hours of guidance, was told fully about NVQs and APL, was given handouts and had telephone support and advocacy. **The very effective co-operation between services is evident in this case study. It is also the case that the project had itself triggered the support this woman needed.**

Marie was disappointed about not being able to do the APL and feels that she was misled about the cost, *If I'd known the cost I'd never have started in the first place.* She had attempted to contact her employers to discuss with them the possibility of paying for her. She left messages on the answer machine but when she eventually spoke to the relevant person it was not mentioned. The APLACS advisor had also offered to contact her employers but this was not taken up. As Marie put it, *If you have been in a job for four years and your employer is satisfied with what you do why do they need you to have an NVQ to prove you can do the job?* She felt that if there were promotion opportunities in the company it might be different, but this did not apply to her.

She said that the project had done well to provide services at a subsidised rate and she saw it as useful to people who are in a full time job or where their employer is paying or if they have "lots" of money. However,

There is no way you can do it if you work part time, are on income support, and a one parent family. I could only have done it if my employer had paid.

Marie found the appointments with APLACS easy to arrange. She saw two different advisors but was not concerned about this, *It doesn't make a difference if they know what they are doing.* She felt that they were both helpful and did their best. Money was the only factor that made it difficult for her to use more of the service.

Marie had heard of the Careers Service, the CDCs and WEETU before using the project. She had visited the CDC once in the past. She had been to see WEETU more recently to get

advice on applying for a job. She had attended their drop in advice session but had to wait an hour by which time the session was finished and she was unable to see anyone. She would like to be able to use a women's centre and obtain guidance about what would be best for her. She feels that WEETU have the right idea but they need more staff.

Overall she felt that she had paid £30 for something she didn't really get. (This could be questioned.) She felt strongly that she was misled by the Information Pack - the number of units required for APL needed to be clearer as did the cost of each unit. She thought that it would be a good idea to contact employers directly to see if they are willing to purchase the services for their staff.

The training outcome of Marie's experience has, however, been a very positive benefit arising from her use of the project's services. It also illustrates the effective provider network in the region.

Outcome update

Marie is getting on well with the course. She has completed the work for Level 1 and is now working on Level 2 and the diploma. She is enjoying the training and the people on it, *We are all in the same boat and we all have a laugh and help each other.* Once she has her diploma she plans to look for a job with longer hours and better pay.

5.3 Susan

This registered unemployed woman is on a government funded training scheme. She has been prepared to fund a personal one to one guidance service within the project (three one hour long sessions). A graduate with two degrees and no children, she has been the casualty of cuts in public expenditure on the arts. She has been an arts administrator for most of her working life

Susan is 38 years old and has no children. She has a BA degree in Music as well as a second BA in English and Philosophy. She has lived in Hertfordshire, Birmingham and London, and now lives in central Norwich. She is currently registered unemployed.

Most of her work experience has involved arts administration in visual arts venues and fine art and craft galleries. She has always worked for small organisations and this has enabled her to be involved in a variety of activities such as policy making, research, publicity and graphic design as well as administration.

She is trying to sort out, in career terms, how she is going to manage a change in career direction and what that direction should be. In late 1993 Susan visited the Norwich Career Development Centre where she heard about psychometric tests. She was interested but could not afford the £50. She was advised to go to City College to find out about courses. She went back to the CDC before Easter 1994 and it was suggested that she go to a local council training centre to do an Adult Training course in Art, *It felt like there was nothing else the advisor could do for me.*

When interviewed, Susan had begun an adult training (AT) course in Art. It is full time for ten weeks. She had also been attending City College one day a week for a course in Furniture Craft.

Susan was very clear that she wanted to do some kind of design work but needed training on the manufacturing and technical side of design. She would like to learn on the job but it is difficult to do as apprenticeships and placements are hard to come by. She could do training as part of a degree or sandwich course in design but she felt no one would offer her employment without appropriate technical qualifications.

On the AT course, she has been able to practise

art but not design. She also has had limited access to computers at the centre. However, as she has no experience of technical drawing, it would be difficult for her to use the computers for drawing in any case.

The Furniture Craft course Susan was doing at City College is better equipped. When she first began, she wanted to do more furniture design, but it was not a large part of the course. She was not getting what she wanted and therefore opted out in the middle. She also found it difficult being in an all male environment and in a class with full time students who had a good deal more experience. She was also having to cope with a personal crisis at the time.

Susan has since returned to complete the college course, but will not be sitting the City and Guilds exam as she has missed too much. She now feels more positive and hopes to make the most of what is left.

Susan heard about this project in late March via a friend who had read an article in a local newspaper. She had also sent off for an Information Pack which Susan then borrowed. On reading the pack, she was mainly interested in the personal guidance and the work placement services. Her main concern was money but she realised the unit price was subsidised and that the services would cost far more on a private basis.

She dropped in at the Access Centre for initial guidance. Personal one to one guidance seemed to be the most appropriate option. She paid £30 on the same day and an appointment was arranged for her to see an advisor at WEETU. When interviewed, Susan had had two sessions of the three to which she was entitled. She was waiting until finishing her AT course before arranging a final meeting.

In the first personal guidance session, Susan told the advisor about her situation, her experience and her thoughts for the future. This was the third time she had rehearsed her situation to a career guidance service having been to both the Access Centre and a CDC previously.

However, the WETU advisor was easy to talk to and gave her a mix of counselling and guidance which was what she needed.

Susan benefited much more from her second session. The advisor went through Susan's CV and helped her produce a much more effective version. They worked out a short term work plan for what Susan could be doing whilst on the AT course as well as a longer term action plan. They discussed the idea of a design course. Susan would need to prepare a portfolio for this and would need to find funding. The advisor gave her information about funding routes and encouraged her to go forward.

Susan still has a third session to come but she commented, *I hoped to have got more from the service, but maybe that's just me, the way I am.* In terms of paying for a professional's time, she feels she will have had her money's worth although the money was difficult to find in the first place.

Because Susan already had a background in the arts, none of the advisors she has seen have actually asked her whether she has the right qualifications for doing design, ie, qualifications in the more scientific and technical side of design. She has had to think about it herself and feels she has had to find a lot of information on her own. No one has encouraged her to do an actual degree in design, *It may be that a degree in Design is simply not available locally, but I would be prepared to travel or move.* She wondered whether another advisor may have been able to give her more information. **There is immense challenge to workers in the guidance field where clients have highly specialised or technical needs.** Adults can also be particularly demanding, especially when they are experiencing stress or anxiety about work.

Using the personal guidance service within this project was Susan's last attempt at seeking advice from career guidance agencies. Although she was dubious to start with, overall she felt that the project was helpful for women in a similar position to her own (ie, women of her

age group) who have already done many courses and who are now changing career direction. **The service she had received to date had been a combination of advice and counselling which she felt was ideal.**

As Susan said,

There are many factors in your life, so you need an advisor who will look at the whole picture. My main problem is money and the fact that I am impetuous about getting on.

She would like to start a design course by September but fears it may be too late to apply. She has no one to back her financially and cannot afford to pay for art materials. She does not qualify for a grant. If she cannot find money to do a full time course, she said she would consider doing a one day a week 'Return to Learn Art and Design' course at City College during 1994/95.

Outcome update

Since Susan completed her personal guidance, she feels things have been falling into place. She has had an extension of her Adult Training programme until the end of the year and wants to go back to the college one day week to continue learning about furniture making. She has decided to set up a furniture business when she finishes Adult Training and hopes to benefit from the Enterprise Allowance Scheme. Susan completed a business course at Norwich Enterprise Agency Trust last year and now needs to undertake some market research for her business plan. She has met other furniture makers and has been receiving constructive ideas and advice about setting up a business. Her main problem when last interviewed was finding somewhere to live that has sufficient space for a workshop.

5.4 Clare

This woman is a trained WPC who left the police force and subsequently developed a very

successful small business which she ran from home while her children were young. As the first woman to use the project, her story indicates some of the early 'teething' problems. It also indicates the flexibility within the project and particularly the flexibility needed where a woman returner has severely lost confidence. In this particular case, APL would theoretically be ideal. However, the personal commitment involved in acquiring units of NVQs through APL is fundamental to their use and, in this case, the woman had not yet acquired the confidence to follow this route.

Clare lives in a village a few miles from Norwich with her husband and two school age children. They moved to Norfolk because of her husband's job.

Clare left school with 5 O levels and some CSEs. She was mainly interested in arts subjects and wanted to do French A level but this was not available at her school. She left school at 17 after one year of A level study and joined the police as a cadet. She only remained in the force three years as she felt the job did not really suit her. She was married by this time and when she and her husband moved to Norfolk she started her own business. Her business in hiring out baby equipment was an original idea. It has since been copied by many people and there is now a trade association for this type of commercial activity.

She ran the business from home for five years. She wanted work that she could do from home while her children were young. However, Clare found that it completely took over her private life with people knocking on the door and telephoning at all times of the day. She said that she would never run a business from home again. Clare obtained the use of premises in her village and continued to run the business from there for a further two years. Four years ago,

Clare decided to close it down even though it was doing very well. It was no longer what she really wanted to do but she felt she had learned a tremendous amount from the experience as she had had to do all the tasks involved. She has since worked in telephone sales which she hated and recently obtained a part-time job at a specialist garden nursery. As well as weeding and other mundane tasks, she also advises customers about plants and their care.

Having heard about the project through an article in the local press, she sent off for a copy of the Information Pack. When it arrived it was different from her expectations and she found the layout not very helpful. At first she thought the services advertised must be a college course. She spent ages going through the College prospectus looking for the courses as described in the pack and their dates and times. At one point she nearly tossed it all in the bin as she could not make sense of it. Eventually Clare contacted the Research Unit and discovered that the services were not courses but were available to her on an individually planned basis.

She read through the information on the individual services several times and spoke to the Research Unit a second time. She thought that, as it was a pilot project, it might be a good idea to get in early as she would get maximum help. She visited City College both to get more information from the Access Centre and to purchase the services. She had a difficult journey to the College, got lost in the city, and recommended that the Information Pack include a map with details of buses to the College.

Clare was not at first sure whether to invest in computer aided guidance or the Introduction to APL. Although she had worked for herself for seven years she had no evidence of the skills she had acquired. She thought that the computer aided guidance might be too general and decided to take up APL1. She was the first woman to sign up for the project.

The APLACS advisor contacted Clare within a week. They tried to arrange a meeting at the

APLACS office but could not find a time that fitted in with both the buses and her children's school time. Although Clare can drive, her husband has the car for his work. The advisor agreed to visit her at home. Clare felt quite intimidated at the prospect and wondered if the advisor would arrive in a designer suit. This fear proved groundless and she appreciated the personal approach.

Before the first session she knew nothing about NVQs or APL and, in common with some other women, she found that confidence was a barrier to her understanding, *If you're not feeling confident it's hard to take information in.*

Clare found the advisor encouraging which she liked, but she also heard that other people were doing APL in the context of their careers. She found this information intimidating, *I'm not in a career, I can't measure myself against them.*

The advisor suggested that she could do the NVQ in Customer Care based on experience from her business and her current job in the nursery. This worried Clare as she has thrown away most of the documentation from her own business and did not know how long her part time job would last. After the first session she was asked to write notes under various headings such as "Storyboard" and "Overview". However she did not understand the difference between the two and did not complete the task.

The second session was similar to the first. Clare talked about herself in order to explain what she felt capable of but she felt she was being unclear. She did not really know what was expected of her. At the end of the session the advisor left her another task to do. Clare felt she was being tested to see what her capabilities were. It was left with Clare to decide whether she wanted to carry on with the APL and purchase further units. She had by now decided not to do the NVQ. She felt it was good that the advisor did not push her into it but gave her time to think it over.

Clare felt that the advisor was very knowledgeable about APL and NVQs but Clare

herself found the concepts difficult. She felt it was a slightly expensive way to look at what she wanted to do. Nevertheless, she did feel she had received a very good service with a personal advisor visiting her at home twice. Clare understood that the project enabled her to buy different units of service and she thought that this was a good idea as she did not have to commit herself and possibly make a serious mistake.

Overall she felt that the service was valuable in that she chose not to do something, *It's useful to make a decision not to do something.* She did not find it easy to pay the £30. It had to come out of her wages which also go towards paying the household bills. However, she felt it was worth £30 to have someone come to her home to help her. She emphasised her satisfaction with the service.

[Note: Because women found the wide variety of choices difficult to understand without support, the Research Unit contracted WEETU to supply 30 minutes of initial guidance free to women enquiring about the project. The Access Centre also generously provided this kind of assistance without recompense from the project budget.]

Clare would recommend the project to other people, *If you haven't got the confidence to know where to get information, it's a good way to find out.* She also felt that a women only project was beneficial. This she again related to confidence, *Men assume they can do things. Women assume they can't. So women need a little more help.*

Outcome update

Clare has not taken any action since receiving the service and she is still undecided about the future.

5.5 Angela

This is an example of an older and more confident woman who works only a few hours a week.

She is doing an OU course and is very determined about her career now that her children are older. Nevertheless, it took three months of thought and investigation before she decided which service to use. This is also a woman who lives in a remote rural area and her case study illustrates the need for very flexible services to meet rural needs.

Angela is in her late forties and lives with her partner and youngest daughter in a village on the North Norfolk coast. Her partner works full time and Angela works one night a week at a hospital in Norwich in an administrative capacity. With her youngest daughter now nine years old, Angela is preparing for a more demanding job in two years time. She has five children. The four oldest have all been to university.

Angela was brought up in Norfolk but travelled abroad for many years due to the nature of her ex-husband's work. She left school at fourteen having had no encouragement to continue her education. By the time she realised that she would like to do further study she was married and bringing up children. She wanted to become a home economics teacher but was unable to pursue this career as she had four children to care for and her husband's job involved her in entertaining and other social commitments.

Over the years she has, however, studied various subjects at evening classes and local colleges including English, Maths, Typing, and Book-keeping. She has a history of taking up courses and then for various reasons, being unable to take the exam. For example, whilst studying Sociology her marriage broke down and, needing to earn some money of her own, she obtained her current job at the hospital, *I kick started myself to get something that fitted in with the rest of the family.* As a result she was unable to find the time to take her Sociology exam. Similarly, after her youngest daughter

was born she went back to college and did GCSEs in English Literature and in Art and Design. Although she did all the studying for the Art and Design course, she became ill and was unable to take either this exam or the English Literature exam. She has achieved O levels in English Language and a qualification in Food and Nutrition. The latter included the City and Guilds qualification 243 in Public Health.

She is now in her third year of study with the Open University. She has successfully completed the Arts and Social Sciences Foundation courses and is currently doing the Environmental Foundation course. She is finding this quite difficult because of the maths and science involved, *It shows up my lack of education in these areas.*

Although Angela has worked at the hospital for 14 years, she has not received any in-house training apart from an introduction to the hospital's computerised record keeping system. She discussed training possibilities with the personnel officer and was advised that because of her limited hours it would be difficult to offer her anything. It was suggested that she contact City College. Angela did this and was sent information which included leaflets about two short courses: New Opportunities for Women (NOW) and Women in Management (WIM). Whilst she was considering these two possibilities she heard about this project and rang the Access Centre for an Information Pack. Once she had read the Information Pack she rang the Research Unit to say that everything in the pack appealed to her.

One service that particularly interested her was work shadowing but she was not clear what job she wanted to shadow. She therefore focused on the personal and group guidance options. She also considered employee volunteering but this was not a realistic option given her work situation. After some discussion with the Research Unit about her situation and the services available, she was referred to WEETU for free initial guidance to help her decide on the best option(s). WEETU was given Angela's

number and Angela herself rang WEETU and left a message on the answering machine. However an initial guidance session was never arranged.

In mid April Angela contacted the Research Unit again urgently needing advice as she wanted to decide whether to take the NOW or the WIM course, both of which were about to start, and she wanted this to fit in with using the project's services. She was anxious not to take on too many commitments but was aware that the project's services were time limited and did not want to miss the opportunity of using them.

After some discussion about whether to contact WEETU again or the Access Centre, she requested further information on each option which the Research Unit was able to provide. She decided that she needed personal guidance and psychometric testing. She was also going to use the computer aided guidance available free in the Access Centre. The APL options were briefly explained to her and she was advised to seek more expert advice on this from the service provider, APLACS, before finally deciding which services to use. She also used the phone call as an opportunity to talk through the appropriateness of the WIM and NOW courses and decided to take the NOW course and do the WIM course later. Angela was given a name and telephone number for APLACS and vice versa. She was also sent additional information about personality and aptitude tests.

WEETU did eventually contact Angela to arrange initial guidance but by then she had signed up for the NOW course and did not feel the need for any additional advice.

When she was interviewed in mid May, Angela had still not paid for any of the services and planned to do this at the end of the interview. However, as she had not been in contact with APLACS to discuss the relevance of the APL options, she was encouraged to do this before purchasing any units. Following the interview, the APLACS advisor suggested that she see Angela in a Careers Service office a few miles from her home rather than in Norwich which is

over 20 miles away. She also gave advice over the phone. As a result, Angela decided to purchase the Introduction to APL and the psychometric tests. It had taken almost three months for her to come to this decision.

When she was interviewed, Angela was asked if there were any changes that would improve the Information Pack. She said she would have found it helpful if the potential benefits of each service had been included. She did not really understand personality and aptitude tests. It was not clear whether they were for women who already knew what they wanted in career terms or for women who were undecided. Once she had read the Information Pack it was clear what to do next, *The letter said ring the Research Unit and I did. When I spoke to you it was obvious that I needed initial guidance.* She was satisfied with the information and advice she received over the phone.

Angela's experiences of the project and of the NOW course have made her feel quite strongly about the facilities available for women in rural areas. If she had not had her own transport she would have had difficulty even getting to the Careers Service office in her local town, let alone Norwich. When she started the Open University course, Angela was able to see the OU organiser in a town closer to her home than Norwich and she also had her tutorials there. This, *definitely made it easier* for her to start the Open University work.

It was explained to Angela that she could obtain some of the project's services outside of Norwich, eg psychometric testing from the local Careers Service. Although she was aware of the local Careers Service office she was not keen on using them. Overall she felt that she would get a better service if she used the services provided in Norwich.

The lack of initial advice did not put Angela off using the project's services but she felt that it could deter other women. She was very aware of the barriers which constrain women from getting career guidance and advice. She had talked to a number of women about the project

and is aware that some of the other students on the NOW course had obtained the Information Pack but had taken no further action. In some cases money was a barrier but she also perceived that many women needed encouragement to use the services - a friendly phone call or some other support. Based on her own experience, Angela was very aware that women with young children do not have the time to sit and read and do things which are just for themselves. She did not think that they would get around to using the project on their own. Confidence is another factor. When Angela discussed the project with a friend, her friend was furious that women should have to pay to be told what they are good at.

Angela used money from her job to pay for the two units of service. Although finding the money had not been a problem, *It is not easy, it is a big chunk out of my part time pay.* If she decides to pursue the APL route, the funding of additional support, assessment and verification may be more difficult.

Her four older children have all been to university and are doing well and she feels that, *It is my turn to spend some money on myself.* She feels very strongly that women (and men) should be able to take credit for their successful parenting. She feels that this work is undervalued by society and it, *Makes me and other women feel that we have to strive for achievements on paper.* This was one of the reasons she was doing the Open University course. She was not able to do it until her older children had left home, both for financial reasons and because, *I could not have studied to the depth I am now when the children were younger.*

Angela had not used any guidance and assessment services before,

There wasn't anything like this when I was younger. I got no careers advice. I wish I had had some.

She had heard of the Careers Service before - her third and fourth children had used

CASCADE - and of commercial guidance centres around London. She had not heard of WEETU, the Career Development Centres, or the Access Centre before. She now feels very strongly that information about all these services should be made available to women in rural areas.

She felt that the project could usefully include men as well,

Many men are not reaching their full potential. If they take jobs because they have to get money then choice goes out of the window.

She also felt that there are advantages to a women only service as, *A lot of barriers are lifted and we are not constrained by our genes coming into operation.* She also thought it would be an advantage to provide some services for men only.

Angela used the free computer aided guidance in the City College Access Centre and felt *quite comfortable* with the career options that emerged. She arranged to take the psychometric tests in June and found them useful. They reaffirmed what she felt she was like, *I can't avoid who I am,* rather than telling her anything new. Having had the tests she decided that APL was not an appropriate route for her at present and decided to have personal guidance instead.

At her first one to one guidance session, the advisor from the Careers Service went through the careers identified by the computer aided guidance. Angela selected the ones which seemed most suitable and investigated them before her next session. As one of the possibilities was working as a guidance advisor, the Careers Service also offered her the opportunity to spend an afternoon with them informally job shadowing a careers advisor.

Outcome update

When contacted again in July, Angela was still in the one to one guidance process and had not

yet made firm decisions about her future.

5.6 Marian

In this case the woman is employed part-time, has a university degree and a teaching qualification. She is dissatisfied with her work as a library assistant. She took a relatively long career break. She is aware that she now feels both undermined by her lack of work experience and by her relative indecisiveness. She was about to undertake a battery of psychometric tests when first interviewed.

Marian is 41 years old, married and has two children. She has lived in Norwich for 20 years.

In 1973 she completed a degree in English and American History at the local university. She then took a year off and did voluntary work in children's homes and homes for the elderly. She did a course in 'Amenities at Play' and the following year completed a PGCE. She then worked as a community worker for two years before marrying.

She had two children and spent ten years in the home. In 1987 she started work as a part time library assistant and has been there ever since.

She has always been committed to and enjoyed her work. Money has never been of prime importance but she had come to a point at which she would like to earn more and develop a serious career. Her peers from university are much further on in their careers and although she did not regret her career break and her seven years in part-time work, she would like to do something more professionally recognised. She commented, *Some people get into something and carry on without thinking about it. I do not want to do that.*

Marian had no idea what area of work she really wanted to do but she did not see this as

necessarily a problem. The important thing was for her simply to get started and to do something new. She found the whole world of work a complex and problematic area.

After finishing her degree, Marian had used the careers advice centre at the university. The advisor at the time suggested that either some kind of social work or out of doors work would suit her. She was very attracted to these ideas at the time but not any longer.

Marian heard about the project from her husband who works at City College. She had also previously been at a meeting at the College where a member of the research staff had spoken about the project.

The Information Pack was what she expected given what she had initially been told. She thought it was well presented, easy to follow and relevant to her. She was specifically interested in personal guidance, computer aided guidance and psychometric testing but she needed some directed help as she found it difficult to know where to start.

A month after receiving the Information Pack, Marian decided to have an initial guidance session at WEETU. The services were explained clearly to her by an advisor. They particularly discussed employee volunteering and job shadowing. However, she would have had to discuss the possibility of doing employee volunteering with her employer and was worried that the library would not allow her to do this. She was also prepared to consider voluntary work in her own time as she felt she could benefit from this experience. She was very interested in job shadowing if it meant shadowing a professional person who was further on in her career than Marian was.

She came away from the initial guidance session feeling that it had perhaps been a waste of half an hour as she was given very little extra information than she already had from the Information Pack. However, she commented, *another way of looking at it is to view the session as an initial step which can then lead on*

to making a decision. There were certain things she was hoping to discover but was not able to.

Marian thought many of the services offered by the project could be beneficial to her. Group guidance was another option she was considering. She felt it might be useful for her to be in contact with other women who were in a similar situation. Psychometric testing would be another helpful service.

Initially, Marian decided not to pay out any more money on guidance services before she knew exactly what she wanted to do and could therefore validate it. She said that she could not bear the thought of still not knowing what she wanted to do after paying the money. For example, a few years ago she had begun a massage course, paid a lot of money, and then decided not to finish it. If she decided not to take up the services in the project, it would not be because of the cost but because of her own uncertainty.

Marian thought the project was useful to women who were making moves and changing direction in their work, women who needed to find a lead and women who needed it out of necessity (eg, women who were being made redundant and had no paper qualifications for their skills).

In a follow-up interview, Marian reported that she had taken up the option of psychometric testing. It had taken her five months to make this decision. She felt she needed some confidence building which she hoped would be one outcome. Also, if she knew what work she wanted to do, she would like to do some training, although she would prefer to train on the job.

Marian found the psychometric testing very helpful. Like most of the other women who used this service she found that it told her *more or less what I already knew. It came up with lots of things that would suit me that I have in fact already done.* These included teaching, counselling, social work and library work. It also highlighted her other areas of interest -

creative writing and administrative work.

She particularly liked the way in which it demonstrated how her personal qualities can be beneficial in various settings *It made me feel more positive about my qualities.* Marion also then decided to use the personal guidance service. She wanted some immediate help with a job application and the WEETU advisor was able to see her the next day, a Saturday morning.

As well as helping her with the job application, *the advisor was good at drawing out what I can do and how I can use my qualities and plan for my future.* She still has another session before completing this service and was also considering going on to group guidance.

Outcome update

As Marian works in the information section of the library and also works with the Bangladeshi community in Norwich, she is now considering doing voluntary work for the recently launched Norfolk and Norwich Council for Racial Equality. The CRE has established a weekly advice service in Norwich.

She is also applying for jobs.

6. INDICATIVE CASE STUDIES OF NON-USERS AFTER ENQUIRY AND INITIAL GUIDANCE

6.1 Mary

This is the profile of a woman returner who has worked at low waged, part-time jobs throughout her marriage and between the births of her three children. She has been unemployed for a year and a half but not registered as such. Childcare is a major factor in her decision making. Realistic goals that link into the needs of the local labour market emerge in this case study as a gap that is often characteristic of women returners' needs. This woman wanted a job shadow but the provider was unable to arrange the service. She has now gone straight on to a photography course. The difficulty in arranging a job shadow illustrates problems of product development (ie, new and additional services) in the project itself.

Mary is 38, married and has three children, aged four, nine and eleven. She left school at sixteen with O levels in English, Maths, Typing and Cookery. She has always lived in Norwich and currently lives in a suburb about three miles from the city centre.

On leaving school she worked for a large Norwich family firm in the post room and doing accounts. She met her husband there. She was his PA. Mary was made redundant shortly after the couple married, having worked for the company for four years.

Since that time, Mary has had many part time jobs. Her first son was born in 1983 and she began work as an evening cleaner while he was a baby. Her daughter was born the following

year, after which she worked for various factories doing packing and cleaning. Her third child was born in 1989. She then worked for a supermarket as a checkout operator but left a year and a half ago and has been economically inactive ever since. She now calls herself a "domestic engineer".

After her last child was born, Mary suffered from post natal depression. Her counsellor suggested she go to City College to see what courses were on offer. Mary needed to get stuck into something and improve her chances of getting back into work to do a job she enjoyed. She visited the Access Centre at the College where she found out about the New Opportunities for Women course and promptly joined it.

As part of this course, the women were told about guidance services in the area such as WEETU and the Access Centre. They were given a taster of everything that was on offer at City College and they had a visit from Norfolk and District Voluntary Services. They were given information on NVQs and on APL. This was the first time she had experienced this kind of guidance and had had no idea that these organisations and services existed.

Mary heard about this project when the Project Co-ordinator gave a talk for the women on the NOW course. As she was interested in anything related to training for women, she took away an Information Pack. She thought the pack was informative, clear and straightforward. The group guidance seemed very similar to the NOW course. *The NOW course is a taster, the project a bit more than a taster.* From what she read, job shadowing seemed likely to be most useful and she approached the Research Unit for assistance.

The Unit arranged an appointment for her the same morning at WEETU for initial guidance. Mary and the WEETU advisor discussed the possibility of doing job shadowing in photography, an area of long term interest. She hoped this would give her experience in something she would like to do and enable her to get information and knowledge about the

running of a photography business.

If I am going to go back to work, I am determined to do something I enjoy instead of doing something for the sake of the money.

The advisor phoned various photography shops in Norwich to see if any would take Mary on for one or two days a week. This proved to be impossible. Mary had half expected such an outcome, *It is such a cut throat business.* The advisor at WEETU suggested that Mary phone the photographers personally but she did not have the courage.

Nevertheless, Mary was happy with the service she received. The initial guidance session was relaxed and without pressure. Mary thought the advisor was very friendly, helpful and encouraging, and had done everything she could.

At first, I was a bit sceptical of her reason for being so friendly. I thought she might just be after my money. But by the end I was fully satisfied with her efforts.

The fact that it was a service for women, *Only made it more relaxed anyway. I felt in control of the situation.*

Had Mary been able to do job shadowing, the £30 contribution would have been a problem although she felt she would have found the money from somewhere. A job shadow would also have had to be during school hours and in term time since she cannot afford to pay for a childminder. *Childcare is a major factor in my life.*

Mary thought the project would suit most women as it offers a broad spectrum of services although she felt that women who wanted to get back to work or wanted a change in career would benefit most. She was not sure whether it would suit women in management as, *They probably have enough motivation and confidence already.*

She thought that an individual mentor would be

very beneficial to her,

This would help me keep the ball rolling to the next step. But still, if I had taken up a service within the project, what would I have done when it finished? Would I have been any better off?

Mary wanted to be able to talk to someone about how she felt, what she needed and what she wanted to do. She needed continuous ideas, support and encouragement.

Since her session with WEETU, Mary has visited the College again to find out about photography training programmes. She is now doing a one day a week black and white photography course. She thinks a computer course would be a good idea as well, but *It all boils down to money.*

Outcome update

Mary is hoping to start a two day a week GCSE in-photography from September at City College. The timing may be a problem for child care. One day starts at 9.00 am. The second finishes at 4.00 pm. Mary's ability to do this course entirely depends on whether she can find work before the autumn in order to pay the £100 a year fee. When contacted again by the research team, Mary had begun an evening shift at a factory but has had to give it up to go into hospital. She was convalescing when we spoke to her but hoped to be able to work at the factory again.

Mary is not sure where the photography qualification will lead her but she is determined to do it and has faith it will help her in some way.

Even though Mary did not buy a service within the project, she felt the discussions she had had with various advisers about the project had been useful to her, *It's just a shame it didn't work out for me.* She strongly feels that the NOW Course she did at City College, *gave me a foothold to go off somewhere.*

This is the case of a single parent in part-time work, well qualified, but indecisive about the future. She has used a range of careers advice services in the past but always in an ad hoc manner. She did not use the project's services because of their cost and felt that informal routes would be sufficient for her.

Sarah is 30 years old, a single parent, and has lived in Norwich for fifteen years. She left school after A levels and went on to university. She gained little work experience other than odd bar jobs before her daughter was born eight years ago. On graduating with a degree in Development Studies, she did a PGCE at the same university but decided she did not want to be a teacher.

During the winter 1994, Sarah began work at Bright Horizons, an after school child care scheme. She was involved with management, administration, co-ordination and the children's activities. When interviewed, she had just had a pay cut which put her in a tight financial position and, as a consequence, she had decided to use her teaching qualifications to try for a job from September 1994.

Although she has qualifications, Sarah felt limited in her choice of employment. Work options depend on help with child care. *With affordable child care I would like to think I could do whatever I liked.* Her lack of formal work experience has worried her at times but she had become determined to use her qualifications and experience, to build up her confidence, and to develop a career.

During the spring, Sarah went to City College to meet various people about possible job opportunities. She met with a member of the Research Unit staff who told her about the project.

Sarah was impressed with the services explained

It was better in a way than I had expected. I'm surprised I hadn't heard of it before. It is something that women could really go for.

She thought the pack was easy to read, nicely packaged and clear.

Sarah went to the Access Centre at the College for a number of reasons and mentioned that she had received the project's Information Pack. At the time she was confused about what to do. She had no idea what career she wanted. She could not decide whether she wanted to teach or not. The advisor's initial guidance gave her confidence because she felt it was supportive and encouraging. Within the project services, she felt that psychometric testing may have been useful.

However, the project services became less relevant once Sarah had decided she wanted to enter teaching. She might need guidance for interview skills but she said she felt that personal friends who knew her well would also be able to help her with CV writing and interviews.

Sarah had also been to the Careers Centre at the University of East Anglia where she did computer aided guidance. The report suggested librarian work or youth work as a suitable career path.

Sarah's main reason for not taking up the project was the cost. She could not afford the £30 contribution.

I would be prepared to pay £30 for the whole package, but women on no wage or a low wage cannot afford to pay £30 for career guidance. The project is not really reaching the women it should do, those who cannot afford the career guidance that is already available.

Nevertheless, Sarah thought the project would suit women who have been out of work for a

long time and who wanted to develop their careers, especially those women who did not have lots of formal experience and qualifications.

Outcome update

Sarah has finished her job at the after school childcare scheme, is now registered unemployed, and is looking for work. She has two weeks of employment over the summer as manager of a council playscheme but strongly feels the need for further careers advice and guidance. She would like to undertake a word-processing course. There is a possibility that Sarah will be offered a campaigning job for six months but she needs to decide whether she wants to continue looking for teaching posts.

6.3 Denise

This is a classic case of the mature woman without formal qualifications and a history of interrupted work, some very low waged. Her highest achievement in the workplace occurred before her children were born when she was a trainee retail supervisor. She had no previous concept of careers guidance before hearing about this project. The services in the project appealed to her but she could not afford the contribution. This is an example of a woman who is in low waged, part-time work, who is local, married and living on a small income margin.

Denise is 54 years old. She has been married for 34 years and has three children, ages 31 to 15. Her son is married with two children. Her eldest daughter is Head of Technology at a local school. Her husband is a self-employed plumber. She lives four miles from the centre of Norwich.

Denise left school at 15 and went to work in an office for a dairy company where she did book-keeping. She found this boring as there was

not much to do. She moved on to work in a department store where she stayed for eight years moving to a post as a trainee supervisor. She was involved in ordering stock and managing accounts before leaving to have children.

When her first two were old enough, Denise went back to work in retail, spending time in two different department stores. She left again when her last child was born but she still needed extra money. She did part-time cleaning for eleven and a half years to help support the family.

Denise then became a playgroup leader and did this work for a further six years, four mornings a week. At the same time, she was involved in the evenings with a junior club for children ages 7-12. This work comprised arranging games and events as well as educational input. She also worked with a playscheme for 5-12 year olds during the school holidays.

Denise was able to do a 'Playgroup Foundation' course (PPA) and a further follow up course for which she received an attendance certificate. The community centre where she was employed paid half the fee. She feels it is much better for people to be trained and have qualifications. At present, PPA trained workers are attempting to gain NVQs in Child Care and Education (see 8.4).

When interviewed, Denise was working as a midday supervisor and cleaner in a local school.

She heard about the project from an article in the local newspaper. She wanted to find out more about the project for a number of reasons. She desperately wanted to change her job. She would love to go back and work in a playgroup but she would now need an actual NNEB qualification or comparable NVQ because of changes in European Law. She would undertake either route but cannot afford the cost.

Denise would also be interested in training for computing and office skills. She had considered becoming a medical secretary. All she wanted was a job that involved meeting people

She had never used guidance or assessment services before. She had not heard of them and had no idea where they were. She had never heard of WEETU or the Career Development Centres.

Denise thought there was a lot of useful material in the project's Information Pack but she had not read it thoroughly. She thought some of the services were probably relevant but money was the main reason for deciding not to use them. She commented,

What makes me angry is that people on the dole can get training for free, for example in computing or typing. We are struggling all day to pay our bills and buy occasional clothing. If you have no qualifications, you have no chance to learn, no chance at all. When you are on a low income and cannot claim benefit, it's like you are in a trap.

Denise felt the odds were slightly against her because she did not have many qualifications and she had little money. She was hoping the project would be useful to her and to other women of her age who wanted to get back into full time work.

She concluded,

It all boils down to money. If there is a chance for people to do something about their situation they would be better off if they took it up. But even if I had money and took up a service, I would not necessarily get anywhere because of my age. There is no job guarantee for women of my age.

Outcome update

Since being interviewed, Denise has not taken any action on training or jobs as money is still the stumbling block. She has, however, been informed about the free services provided by WEETU and she may pursue these.

7.1 Gail

In this case, a woman in middle management faced redundancy twice with the same employers as a consequence of her local authority employer sub contracting out its catering services. Her situation illustrates: a) excellent co-operation on her behalf between the participating partners within the project; b) the role of the Redundancy Advice Network (RAN) in assisting her use of the project; c) the additional support her employer was able to subsidise because of the project's financial assistance; and d) the excellent personal support provided by her APLACS advisor as the client went through the APL route to MCI.

This client completed both MCI level 4 through APL and also undertook the group guidance option within the project. Her employer funded all the contributions.

Gail is in her mid thirties and lives in a suburb on the edge of King's Lynn in North Norfolk. She obtained a BSc degree in Catering Systems in 1980 and a City and Guilds 730 Teachers Certificate in 1992.

Gail has always worked in the catering industry, first in the West Midlands and then, from 1984, for a large firm of contract caterers in Norfolk mainly providing school meals. Due to increasing competition and the recession, the company underwent a major reorganisation at the end of 1993. A six person tier of middle management was made redundant, including Gail. All, apart from Gail, were over 50 and received a combined retirement/redundancy package. Gail was offered redundancy and

career counselling. As the proposed redundancy payment was low, she decided to accept a demotion to Contracts Manager, much the same job but for less money. Again she was offered voluntary redundancy within months and decided, *That's it, I'm off.* The redundancy package was put together in a different way the second time and included a training package.

Gail first heard about APL through the counselling she was receiving from the Redundancy Advice Network (RAN) in Norwich. A careers advisor from the CDC also told her about APL and she decided to pursue it. WEETU and RAN negotiated with her employer who agreed to pay for the necessary units of the APL service with the financial support of the project. Gail suggested, *There was a guilt factor at work but through the project they could get the service I wanted within the budget.*

Gail had already begun some employer funded APL work for MCI level 4 with APLACS before starting her new job as Contracts Manager at the end of July 1993. With the subsidised entitlement, however, she has been able to include some units at Level 5 and was hoping to finish her targeted programme by the end of June or July 1994.

Gail reported considerable flexibility both within the project and by APLACS staff. She first met her advisor once a month at both the APLACS offices in Norwich and at her advisor's home. She was also offered advisor visits to meet in King's Lynn.

I didn't mind travelling to Norwich as it gave me a day out. I have always had a choice of times. I'm not sure how long the sessions are meant to be but the advisor puts in loads of extra time. She said I could ring her between sessions if I got stuck. When she thought I was struggling, we met every two weeks. In May 1994 we had to

work quickly because I was leaving my job, so we met weekly. Sometimes we met in the evening in the advisor's own time.

She thought the advisor was very understanding of her needs and said she had given Gail a very substantial amount of counselling.

The more she heard about my work situation the more horrified she became. She has taught me things about management that I would never have learned from any course or job. When I was made redundant I was very upset because I did not expect it. I was the only one not entitled to a retirement package and I felt very alone. I had to do my job in the day and then in the evening I had to write about it for the APL. It was very upsetting. The advisor was very good with me. I might have gone nutty without her to keep me going.

Gail could not get anywhere with APL without discussing her work situation with the advisor but she was very mindful of what she said about her employers to any outsider.

In order to make progress with my portfolio, I had to tell the advisor things that can't be passed on. I had to speak to the Personnel Manager to get information for my portfolio but I am under no obligation to speak to or report back to her. I had to speak to my bosses and colleagues to obtain letters of testimony for my portfolio but I didn't like doing this. My go-between with my employer was the RAN co-ordinator and there were no problems with this.

She found some of the criteria for the NVQ

confusing. The instructions appeared restrictive but when she saw the assessor she found that they were less stringent (eg, her portfolio could be hand-written as opposed to typed). She found some of the work difficult as her job had not included some of the required experience such as writing minutes of meetings and other paper based work.

Gail had heard of NVQs and APL before and was aware of NVQs in the catering industry but her boss was only interested in City and Guilds qualifications. She had also received computer aided guidance and some careers advice prior to this project. However, when she first found out about her redundancy, her wish to attend the Hotel and Catering Institute Managers Association for career counselling was countered by her Personnel Manager who suggested she see someone outside the catering industry in order to enhance her options. The company arranged some redundancy counselling for her. Gail had not heard of WEETU or the City College Access Centre but did know about the Careers Service work with young people. She was not aware of the TEC Career Development Centres.

In interview, Gail felt that the project should be for women only,

It is a good idea to have something special that concentrates on women's careers because women have different needs to men. However it did not make a difference to me personally.

Gail would recommend the APL service to people in a similar position to her own but thought that some might find it easier to do a straightforward management course.

It has been difficult for me to get motivated to do the APL. I have struggled with it. Not because the advisor has not helped me but because of my job and the situation that led me to be doing the NVQ. I have done courses

on my own but this one was hard because it brought up my unhappiness about my job. Once I start things I like to see them through to the end and I hope that this will be useful.

Outcome update

Gail has now completed her portfolio and submitted it for assessment. Before doing so she showed it to a prospective APL candidate and assisted her in understanding what APL involves.

Gail also used the group guidance services within the project and found them very useful. She has amended her CV and is improving her computing and word processing skills at the local college. She is considering moving into management and will be applying for jobs when she sees suitable ones advertised.

7.2 Anne

This senior teacher was able to use the project to accelerate her MCI level 4 NVQ. Unusual within the teaching profession itself, she has become a vociferous advocate of both NVQ and the APL route. The project subsidy itself has added considerable net added value to her fixed training allocation (employer funded). This pattern was found to be a common one when employers had specified training budgets. In effect, the APL subsidy allowed such budgets to 'stretch' further.

Anne is forty, married and has always lived in Norfolk. She is a senior school teacher and lives in a small village near the North Norfolk coast. Her husband is an insurance broker and at times Anne has been the main breadwinner.

Anne undertook teacher training in Worcestershire and returned to Norfolk for her

first job in the coastal secondary school where she still works. She achieved internal promotion quickly and has been Head of the Upper School since 1992. When interviewed, she had been at the school for 19 years and is seeking promotion to a deputy headship.

Anne's responsibilities include the Business and Information Studies Department, management of staff absence and sickness cover, and implementation of staff appraisals. She also has an additional job as Assistant Head of Adult Education for the LEA and is a School Governor.

Outside of work Anne organises the annual village carnival and is on the Village Hall Management Committee.

Anne first heard about the project through an advisor at APLACS with whom she had already been working on an APL route to MCI units at level 4. The school was fully funding her NVQs. The impetus to undertake MCI Level 4 arose out of her annual staff appraisal.

I'm at a stage in my career when I need qualifications to apply for deputy headships. I considered the Open University courses and felt I did not have time to do them. I therefore started looking seriously at APL. The APLACS advisor and I considered MCI level 5 but because I do not do all the items covered at that level, we decided on MCI 4.

(Anne was not aware of all the other services in the project and had not seen the Information Pack when interviewed. She had only considered APL.)

On the advice of APLACS, Anne sought support from her school to use the project for additional subsidy. The School has been very enthusiastic and is monitoring the whole process to identify potential benefits for other staff as well as for Anne. The School had put

aside £650 for Anne's personal development. With the project's support for Anne's APL, she has been able to extend this allocation to include the additional top-up training she needs. As a grant maintained school and one which is committed to LiP, Anne's employers have been able to establish a better than average budget for in-service staff training. The School policy is to pay for training if the employee can justify its relevance to the School development plan.

Anne began looking at the APL option with the APLACS advisor in October 1993 but her work on MCI level 4 accelerated during March/April of this year as a result of the project's subsidy. She had had several sessions with her advisor and had met her assessor when she was interviewed by research staff. By July 1994 she had two units ready for assessment and she was aiming to complete the full NVQ by September.

Anne's Advisor is flexible in terms of time and location. During term time they meet in the evenings but in the holidays Anne sees her advisor in the afternoon. They meet in either one of their homes. The advisor is,

Extremely easy to talk to. Her enthusiasm is infectious. She understands my situation and my needs and is knowledgeable about my work situation within both the School and Adult Education. We have not discussed the possibility of future jobs but she is aware of the responsibilities within a deputy head post. I have used her as a sounding board if I have had a problem at school. She is very helpful and also tells me to record it all to use in my portfolio. I am definitely getting my money's worth.

Anne's only concern is whether the people who interview her for promotion will accept her NVQ and understand what it is. In order to get around this, she wants to talk to the staff in her School

about her portfolio and share it with them. She has already had to talk to other staff in order to authenticate her evidence. There is some cynicism about NVQs within the teaching profession. When Anne first discussed her portfolio with colleagues, several wanted to have a look at what was involved.

Except for in-school staff appraisal, for which Anne is responsible, she had not used any guidance or assessment services before.

Anne does not feel happy about providing the service to women only,

I think it is a very dangerous thing to do in an age of equality. If a male was interviewing me, would he belittle my qualification if it was available for women only?

She does, however, think women are at a disadvantage in seeking senior management posts and do not generally have as many opportunities for further training as men appear to have.

Anne did not expect to have to go into so much detail about the evidence for her portfolio,

I make a lot of decisions without thinking about them. I am now having to work out why I made them. APL is almost tailor made for me. The service has made me feel that my job is far more important than I had previously appreciated. I now feel more positive and confident about my role. I have found that I can see different ways of approaching people and dealing with things. I am finding the whole experience extremely useful and it is generating new ideas for me.

Outcome update

Prior to doing APL, Anne had not shown much interest in in-service training but had given pri-

ority to her many responsibilities within the school. Since beginning the APL process, she has attended a course on women in management and will be looking at other training opportunities when she has completed her NVQ. She intends to apply for deputy headship posts in the next six months.

7.3 Paula

This woman is in a part-time clerical post and was the only client for whom a job shadow was arranged. Her commitment to learning was already demonstrably high. The project gave her the opportunity to experience an occupational field in which she had had a long standing interest but not a clear understanding. The mother of four children, she is a labour market returner who has helped to support her family through the period following her professional husband's redundancy.

Paula is 46, married and has four children between the ages of 10 and 18. She has lived in Norwich for five years. Her first job after leaving school was with the Foreign Office as a shorthand typist. She subsequently spent two years in Portugal as the Chancery's Secretary but resigned from this job (*I was bored stiff*) and went back to further education for a year in Kent. She did A level English, special level English and O level History and French. She worked briefly again before marriage but withdrew from the labour market when she had her children. She also began a foundation year in Technology with the Open University but did not complete it.

Three years after moving to Norwich, her husband, a chartered surveyor, was made redundant. The family was on income support for a year before her husband applied for an Enterprise Allowance Scheme to develop his own business. Paula has been working as a part time secretary at a local college for the last two

years and in September 1993 she began a part time four year Business Studies degree course. She completed a **Women into Management** short course in the spring of 1993.

Paula first heard about the project while on a course at the College and again through an article in the staff newsletter. She sent for the Information Pack which she thought was good but,

*It could have been more simple.
I'm wondering whether it
frightened off a lot of people.
Maybe it was pitched too high.*

She felt job shadowing was what she needed and successfully sought funding from her employers.

I want to move on from my job and experience new things. I want to start a network of my own and use my experience to apply it to other jobs. It will be a good confidence building exercise. I feel that with training and experience I could do almost anything.

Paula needed initial advice to decide what kind of job would best suit her as a shadow. An advisor in the Access Centre at City College went through the screening stages of guidance with her to identify her interests and aptitudes. Careers guidance itself was an attractive option to Paula who was particularly interested in guidance for adults,

Mature people come into my office at work asking about higher and further education and how it could fit into their lives. I like seeing the confidence building up in them when they succeed in getting on to courses.

The advisor arranged for Paula to job shadow at two of the TEC's Career Development Centres for two to three hours per week over a period of four weeks. When interviewed, she had had six sessions of job shadowing. She shadowed

several different advisors each week and sat through at least two interviews with clients on each afternoon. At the beginning of every interview, Paula first sought client permission in order to ensure confidentiality. Some clients expressed appreciation at her presence remarking that it made the interview less formal.

Paula felt she had learnt a great deal about what career guidance involves,

I have learnt about training providers in the area and where to go for information. When clients made enquiries about courses at the College, I was able to be useful. I think there should be more liaison between the CDCs and the College.

At the end of every interview, Paula talked through the interview process with the advisor and assessed strengths and weaknesses in the interaction.

In all cases the interview is an exhausting process for the interviewee and the interviewer has to try not to anticipate what the interviewee will say.

Paula reported that all the advisors she had shadowed were very friendly and helpful,

They have all advised me about what I should do next and suggested that I do a Guidance and Counselling course. I have been helped more than I expected.

Paula felt very strongly that the project should be opened up to men as well,

In an equal opportunity society I think that women only projects tend to marginalise women. It makes women look as if they are on the fringe.

In the past Paula had used the computer aided guidance service in the Access Centre at City College. The data, however, suggested that the most suitable job for her was that of a housekeeper, not a suggestion with which she was happy.

There is not enough leeway between answer opportunities. Greater occupational possibilities should be available.

She had vaguely heard of WEETU before the project began but only as an acronym,

All the training providers and advisory services can get very confusing. It is difficult to work out how they all fit together, who goes to who and how. Why isn't it all under one umbrella? How do people find out about WEETU and the Norfolk TEC, for example? People talk in initials all the time. I am suspicious of small organisations using initials. There is a terrible need for a simplification of things.

Overall Paula was highly satisfied with the service she received. She found no problem in paying for the service and felt that she had received more than her money's worth. Her family had been very supportive and there were no barriers caused by family commitments as she was doing the job shadowing in her free time. She highly recommended the job shadowing option to other women. Paula said that she hoped to do more job shadowing at the City College Access Centre after her entitlement was completed.

Outcome

Paula has since had three job interviews but no job offers as yet. Two of the potential employers would not entertain the idea of her continuing her degree course at the same time as working for them. The other job was two

grades higher than her current position and required the RSA qualification in Education and Training Guidance. An internal candidate was appointed.

Paula has decided to begin study for the RSA Diploma in Guidance from September 1994. It will cost £400 and she is going to fund this herself as she wants to progress her career as quickly as possible.

The job shadowing consolidated her ideas about career guidance work. She is keen to work with people facing particular difficulties and challenges in seeking work - those with special needs, mature people, women returners, those experiencing redundancy, ex-offenders and the long term unemployed.

7.4 Rose

In this case, a young woman graduate had not found either permanent employment or career direction in the three years after leaving university. Her work profile is one of part-time, voluntary, short term contract work and registered unemployment. While on a temporary full-time contract, her employer funded her within the project to undertake a battery of psychometric tests. She wanted help in identifying a match between her aptitudes/personal qualities and career planning. This case is a good example of employer support for the peripheral workplace.

Rose is 24, has no dependants and has remained in Norwich since completing her undergraduate degree in Development Studies at the local university. She spent nine years of her childhood in Belgium and is well travelled.

Since graduation, Rose has had a variety of jobs, both voluntary and paid. She first worked for a

development and environment education centre doing research for a campaign and also doing voluntary work in the centre's information and resource shop. She was registered unemployed for almost a year before finding a temporary research post at the university. From this job, she saved enough money to travel to Kenya and Ethiopia in the hope of gaining some overseas development work experience. When Rose returned to England, she had neither money nor job.

Registered unemployed for another six months, Rose managed a short period in Belgium working as a facilitator with an education exchange project for East African and European young people. This was on a voluntary basis. On her return, she returned to research work and was on a temporary contract when interviewed.

Rose heard about the project in February through colleagues and sought employer support for a battery of psychometric testing. She was very clear in her mind that this service would benefit her more than the others. She hoped to find out whether there were any areas of work that would be suitable to her that she had not thought of before and she hoped that the tests would confirm that her present career intentions were leading in the right direction.

Rose took four different tests: the 16PF(5), the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Gordon's Survey of Personal Value (SPV) and Gordon's Survey of Interpersonal Values (SIPV). She found the tests demanding and tiring but insisted on doing four rather than three tests. One question she wanted answered was,

How did the advisor decide what tests she should do? He knew a bit about my background but was it enough to make such a decision?

Throughout the feedback session Rose felt the report was more or less 'spot on'. In general terms, her personality was described as extroverted, below average for anxiety, low on toughmindedness, and high on independence.

Suitable career themes pointed strongly towards nurturing-altruistic types of occupation. Social work, personnel and teaching were suggested. Careers within the creative-self-expressive and venturesome fields would also be suitable.

The ideal work environment for her would be one that was warm, understanding and people oriented. There should be minimal insistence on rules, systems and procedures. Counselling, psychology, social work and teaching were suggested. There was a strong degree of agreement between the tests.

In Gordon's SPV test Rose scored high in variety and change and decisiveness. The report said,

Such people like to do things that are different and varied and like travelling, going to unusual places and experience an element of danger. They enjoy jobs in which they can make decisions since they have strong and firm convictions.

Rose agreed to a large extent with the career themes suggested by the advisor but thought they could have been more specific. When she told the advisor of her career interests, in tourism, third world development, ethnic minority issues, refugees, and adult education, he was encouraging and believed all these possible career paths would suit her personality. She told him,

I am specifically interested in the possibility of doing an MA in the Sociology and Anthropology of Travel and Tourism. This would enable me to combine my interests in development, culture, travel and education. The advisor supported this idea fully.

Subsequently, Rose has been accepted on an MA in London in this field. Her main concern now is finding a source of funding for this educational route. Financial barriers may delay

her ability to undertake the year long qualification. Her employer is encouraging her to do the MA and believes it is the best step for her to take at the present time.

Before using the project, Rose had received career guidance at her university careers centre and had found it very useful and encouraging. She was helped with her CV, interview skills, funding, postgraduate courses and other general advice. She had also been to the Norwich Career Development Centre after having been unemployed for six months. This visit had resulted in a government funded word-processing course at a local council training centre which she also found beneficial. She had never heard of NVQs or APL before the project.

Overall, the psychometric testing was useful in that it confirmed that her career aspirations were suited to her personality. It encouraged her to investigate further educational qualifications. She has recommended the service to other people,

You can keep the psychometric tests results and refer to them over time. I'm sure they will be useful to me throughout my life.

Outcome

Rose eventually decided not to pursue the MA course due to lack of funding and because she felt the need to obtain more practical experience. She is applying for jobs and would like to move to London for work. Meanwhile, her temporary research contract having ended, she has two part-time jobs locally, both of which are short-term.

7.5 Allison

This is an example of a woman returner whose early career in banking, though successful, did not leave her with recognised paper qualifications. She also had a history of commitment to learning and had particularly

As an advisor within a local careers guidance service, she had early access to information about the project and understood the principles behind APL. Her employer funded her through the project to gain an NVQ level 3 in Business Administration. In some cases, the project delivery bodies themselves recognised the value of using the funding assistance in order to support their own staff.

Allison is in her late forties. She was brought up in Lancashire and lived in London before her marriage brought her to Norfolk where she lives in a small market town in the northwest part of the county. Allison left a promising career in banking to have a family in 1984. Her two children are now at school and she is working as a part-time careers advisor herself. Her first job upon returning to work was as a receptionist for a guidance service. From that start, she rapidly gained promotion and moved into an advisory position.

Having left school with a number of O levels, Allison took evening classes in word-processing, typing and a PPA Foundation course while her children were young. In 1992 she attended an LEA Adult Education returner's course "Choosing the Way" which helped her back into paid work.

On leaving school, Allison worked in banks for eleven years moving from administration to cashier posts. When she left to have her family, she was a manager's assistant with responsibility for supervising staff. Her current job is part-time and is in a new occupational area for her. Like many women returners, Allison has had to start afresh and work her way up from a junior post. She expressed an interest in the advisor's post at an early point and was given the opportunity to fill in occasionally when

staff were off sick.

When there was a reshuffle in the agency, she was offered an advisor's post as a temporary move and has since been made permanent. Psychometric testing during her first year with the agency had indicated her aptitude for this kind of work.

Allison has also been involved in a wide range of voluntary work - playgroups, mother and toddler groups, cub scouts and playgroups and is treasurer of a local gym club. When the children were young, she did occasional evening bar work.

She was already familiar with APL through her workplace and had been an APL candidate 'guinea pig' for a member of staff who was working towards a TDLB internal verifier award. Through the project, her employer is funding her to work towards an NVQ level 3 in Business Administration through APL. As a route to achieving further qualifications APL had been attractive as an alternative to more evening classes.

It sounded very appealing but I had no idea of what it actually involved.

As part of her job, Allison helps to run "Your Skills Recognised" sessions which assist people who are working toward units of Business Administration level 2. She thereby took part herself when her employer offered to fund her for the NVQ.

As a careers advisor, Allison had a number of professional comments to make about the presentation of the project's Information Pack,

As it came from City College I wondered whether it was only happening in Norwich and whether I would have to be prepared to travel to Norwich. It is not clear that the services are available locally. I deal with people who have a rural outlook.

I also feel that the Information Pack was pitched at too high a level, it does not use layman's language.

For Allison herself this ambiguity was not a problem because her senior manager arranged purchase and supply of the APL services on her behalf. Nevertheless, Allison's comments provided valuable feedback on the marketing task involved.

When Interviewed, Allison was doing the full NVQ through APLACS. She and her advisor produced an action plan of the work to be done before each meeting but Allison was finding it difficult to get through all that needed to be done and was finding the process very time consuming,

I would like to do one unit at a time and get each one over with. The advisor's request is not unreasonable though. You think you have finished or nearly finished something and then you have to find another bit of evidence. The evidence is available within my workplace but I find it difficult to ask people to write letters of testimonial for me. My present appraisal report covers quite a lot of areas.

Allison had begun APL before the project began but found that it was difficult to spend time with her advisor without taking time off from work. She and her advisor had only met on an ad hoc basis. With the flexibility built into the project, APLACS had been able to provide Allison with support away from the work place. She was doing some work on her portfolio during her own time. Her advisor hoped she would finish by the end of July or early in August 1994,

It is helpful to have a specific target to work towards.

Alison felt she had had good support from her advisor. She was being visited once a month and felt the service was very useful, .

More frequent visits would not be worth her while as I would not have got the work done. At present I am consolidating what I have done over the past 20 years. I have no qualifications from my years in banking and if I seek another job in the future the APL will be a nationally recognised qualification.

She would certainly recommend APL to others.

Since her employers were paying for her NVQ, she was not aware of the financial costs. At the same time, she felt her employers had had no influence on the way she used the service and this had given her personal flexibility. Allison had not know about guidance and assessment services before she began working in the career guidance service and this had clearly privileged her.

She did wonder why the project was for women only.

Is it assumed that men do not need help? I think it should be for all. If people are in employment men should not be discriminated against. If the project is successful, it should include men as well.

7.6 Lois

This senior woman manager within the NHS used the APL subsidy within the project at a point of serious concern about her career. With no 'paper' qualifications, she nevertheless had many years of high level management experience. Radical reorganisation of three district health authorities placed

her in a very uncertain position for several months. It was this context which triggered her use of the project.

Lois, in her mid thirties, was Purchasing Manager for a district health authority when she approached the project. Radical reorganisation required all the authority's managers to apply for both new and a reduced number of management posts. At the beginning of April, Lois was effectively on full pay, without a job or a title yet required to report to work while reorganisation was being effected.

Complicating her situation was the fact that she had just returned from maternity leave and was also the breadwinner for the family. Her husband had been constructively dismissed from his job on grounds of ill health during the autumn of 1993. On balance, she was under severe stress about her future. Lois' most compelling immediate need was to gain evidence in recognised qualifications for her considerable skills and experience. She therefore used her personal annual training allocation (awarded to senior health service managers by the Regional Health Authority) to undertake MCI level 5 via APL. Lois also made a contribution herself and by July had purchased a total of 14 units of service.

Midway through the APL process, Lois' employing district health authority was abolished and the geographical area it covered was split between two other existing district HA's. Lois applied for a new post and was appointed Manager of Quality Standards and Consumer Affairs for one of the newly organised authorities. Her new employer paid for three of the 14 units of APL support thus producing a triple contribution partnership between Lois herself, her new employer, and the Regional Health Authority.

Outcome update

By July, Lois was close to completing the MCI NVQ at level 5. APLACS had arranged an advisor, assessment, and verification for her to

be delivered by Lowestoft College. This level of regional flexibility and provider co-operation was critical in securing the service support Lois needed within a very short time scale. On balance, the value of the rapid response time built into the project is demonstrated in this woman's case study.

Introductory Note to Cases 7 - 11:

One of the delivery bodies involved in the project made an early decision to access the subsidy support for its five receptionists. The project itself provided a 'kick start' to investment for support staff and the following case studies of these women indicated the value of the project in assisting resource limited organisations to invest in the learning needs of peripheral and support staff.

Training budgets typically favour staff involved in an organisation's core activities. As women make up the majority of support staff within the public sector particularly, the project has, as in these cases, provided career development opportunities for such staff. The common feature running through all of the following case studies is the high level of commitment to APL and thus to, as they describe it, 'learning' itself by all the women supported by this employer.

In all of the following case studies, the women are traditional returners to the labour market. Nevertheless, despite holding the same grade post in each case, there are wide differences in their circumstances and backgrounds. The age range is from women in their mid-twenties to a woman age 54. Their skills, experience, and learning histories vary significantly as do the relative periods of time they have spent economically inactive.

As a cohort, they reflect the diversity within the broad general definition of "woman returner", thus suggesting both the value and the problems in the use of this generalised terminology. The only common factors amongst the group are that all have children

The decision to select five women supported by one employer was pragmatic. Despite the short time scale of the project, it was still important to track women's experience of the project over a period of time. This employer was an early investor in the project's services. The outcomes of this cohort were uniform in so far as all were successfully working towards full NVQs at the time of writing. But the diversity of background within a single occupation and funded by a single employer proved to be a positive advantage in the overall analysis.

7.7 Jacky

With a disparate range of experience in low skill waged work before her children were born, this woman attended a number of training programmes during a relatively long career break. Her re-entry into the labour market was eased by an informal period of clerical work for a friend. Her formal re-entry to waged labour occurred in late 1991 when she was appointed to a post as receptionist in a careers guidance service. She had worked in this post for two and a half years before receiving employer funded support to pursue an NVQ through the project.

Jacky is in her mid forties, lives in Norwich, and has three children between the ages of 15 and 24. She left school in 1965 with RSAs in English, Maths, Religious Instruction and Typing. She has a basic and advanced qualification in Word-processing, an internal auditors Reception Skills qualification and has done an Introduction to Counselling course.

Jacky did some office work before her children were born and also worked in a canteen, a

factory and a supermarket. She stayed at home when her children were young and returned to work in 1981. On re-entry, Jacky did some very low paid office work for a friend in order to develop her skills and acquire the experience she needed. She now works as a receptionist for a careers guidance service and has been in this post for the past two and a half years.

Jacky's employers put her forward for APL in Business Administration at Level 2 within their liP framework. She had already been doing APL level 3 while acting as a 'guinea pig' for a colleague who was training to be an APL advisor. However, Jacky could not complete at this level due to an absence of supervisory experience. Through the project she has been able to restart APL at level 2. An APLACS advisor discussed her needs and her current experience with her before she began the APL process. The fact that her employers were paying for her work towards accreditation at NVQ 2 had not been a problem,

They offered to pay for it but did not pressurise me to take it up. It was up to me.

When interviewed, Jacky was a third of the way through the APL process. She had had two meetings with an APL advisor of over one hour each. She was finding some of the work difficult,

It is hard to push myself forward. The advisor is helping me to see how the work involved relates to my job. It is all to do with understanding and realising what skills and experience I actually have and use. I haven't found the evidence yet but this should be easy. The work is so time consuming though. I haven't had the time to write everything up.

Jacky hoped to complete the NVQ within six months.

There had been no barriers for Jacky in terms of access to the service or because of other commitments. The advisor was seeing her at her workplace which was very convenient. The

service was as she had expected but she felt there was more involved in gaining an NVQ through APL than by other methods since one had to prove what one could do. A friend gained the same NVQ by having a trained assessor watch her at work and assess her. She would have preferred this method of assessment.

Jacky was finding the advisor easy to relate to,

She is very good. She makes me do the work myself rather than spoon feed me. She understands me and explains things to me well. She keeps praising me and is boosting my confidence. She is encouraging, enthusiastic and she won't let me rest

If Jacky gains the NVQ she believes she will be able to think about doing other kinds of better paid and more demanding work.

It will prove I can do it and I might think of going further. It has been a learning exercise.

Before taking up her current job, Jacky was not aware of careers guidance. She had heard of NVQs because her son did an NVQ in Catering. She expressed support for a women only project,

It is good to encourage women to push themselves forward. I am really trying to push the model for other women.

Jacky has passed the project's Information Pack on to many other women.

7.8 Carol

With the recent break up of her marriage, this woman returned home to Norfolk and spent some time attempting to manage on income from a very low paid clerical post. A short period on a government training scheme helped improve her office skills

and got her into a more appropriate and satisfying post. Her employee's support for an NVQ in Business Administration at level 2 through the project's APL subsidy appears to have increased her commitment both to learning and to her employer.

Carol is in her early thirties and was brought up in King's Lynn in West Norfolk. She lived in Lincolnshire for three years but returned to King's Lynn in 1993 when her marriage broke down.

She had had experience in office work: reception, clerical duties and accounts. For example, while in Lincoln, Carol had worked as a receptionist for a golf club but it required very long hours for very little money. An unemployed friend told her about a course at a local training centre. Though designed for unemployed people, Carol was able to qualify as her income was very low. She thus gave up this job and undertook full time training in the Pitman Diploma, office typing, word processing, and databases. This was combined with a level 1 NVQ and lasted for nine weeks.

When interviewed, Carol had very recently been appointed to a receptionist post at a career guidance agency. When she began the job, her line manager suggested that she undertake the Business Administration NVQ at level 2 and that her employer pay for it. Following a staff appraisal meeting, Carol's manager arranged for her to pursue the NVQ through APL with support from the project. She was also doing a computer course funded by her employer.

Carol had seen an APLACS advisor twice when researchers visited her. She had been meeting her advisor on a monthly basis with phone contact as necessary. She had also had help and advice from a colleague at work. She felt her advisor was extremely good,

I can easily talk to her. She advises me rather than tells me what to do. I can ring her at any

time, and she seems to understand my needs.

Having done the NVQ level 1, Carol already knew the principles of compiling a portfolio. However,

I am finding it more difficult than I expected. I know what I have done but putting it down on paper is a different matter.

She had been allocated time to do her APL work during office hours but she had actually carried out the majority of it at home because of lack of time during the working day. In order to assist her, Carol's manager had allowed her to work overtime for which she was being paid.

She felt the service she was receiving would be very useful.

Everything is needed on paper nowadays and therefore NVQs are necessary. It is affecting everyone. My own future is undecided at the moment as I have only been in my present job for a short while.

Carol was not familiar with the financial arrangements and was not aware of the Employment Department subsidy. If her employer had not been paying she felt she could not have afforded to pay for the NVQ herself but with the benefit of experience she thought,

I would still want to do it and would eventually get the money together. I would want to do the NVQ level 2 just to prove I could do it.

When Carol lived in Lincoln, she dealt with the Job Centre and the Job Club. She did not know about careers advice or the role of the Careers Service.

Unless you are unemployed you don't look for that sort of thing.

Carol felt that it was a good thing that the project was for women only. She believed it likely to give women with children an incentive to go back to work and get training, and

It is useful for women like me who have experience but no qualifications. Women are more likely to attend courses than men.

However, she did not see why men should necessarily be excluded.

Carol was recommending the service to others and she felt her experience of doing APL was affecting her attitude at work,

If you believe in a product you can recommend it to other people and they can believe in you. I think it is a very good idea for career guidance staff to actually experience the services. I am enjoying it. It is very good. You get the support you need at the end of the day.

7.9 Samantha

This 'older' woman has had a history of peripatetic, part-time work throughout her years of child bearing and domestic responsibilities. She took little time out for a career break and at one point had achieved some career success when promoted to manager's assistant in a small firm. However, there was no evidence of commitment to learning until she was offered the opportunity within the project to pursue an NVQ in Business Administration at level 3 via APL.

Samantha is in her late forties, has two grown children and lives in a small town three miles from Lowestoft. She finished secondary school

with no formal qualifications but has since gained RSA accreditation in typing, word-processing and desk top publishing.

On leaving school, Samantha first worked in the printing industry as a book binder but left to enter banking as a clerical worker. She also worked as a clerk for a building merchant before leaving waged employment to have children. When she returned to work, it was initially to a post as supervisory assistant in a school and then as a classroom assistant. Samantha spent some eight years in part-time work of this nature before moving to a clerical post for a photocopier company where she was promoted to manager's assistant. When we interviewed her, Samantha was working as a receptionist/administrator for a careers guidance service in Lowestoft. This pattern of movement within the part-time labour market is a prominent feature of the women returner pattern. It does not necessarily lead to career development as women can find themselves permanently within the peripheral workforce.

Samantha became involved in the project by nature of her employer's commitment to NVQs. She was initially advised (in 1993) to work towards a Business Administration level 3 via APL.

As I did not have a qualification in this subject I decided it would be a good way for me to get one. However, my advisor, who worked for the same agency, was being trained on the job and though I started level 3 over a year ago, my portfolio has been more or less at a standstill. This is not the fault of the APL team or my own adviser but because there has not been a formal schedule of events. It was really difficult to consolidate with the work commitments we were under.

In March 1994, Samantha's employer suggested that she continue the APL within the new project

framework and through APLACS. Her new advisor made a fresh assessment and advised her to do level 2 Business Administration as she had been having difficulty with evidence for the supervisory requirements of level 3.

Within the project agreement, Samantha's APLACS advisor was travelling to her workplace on average once a month. This had proved to be very convenient. The advisor had helped her by using a storyboard approach and by outlining the type of evidence she needed. Her advisor also provided a progress report and set units to complete for each meeting.

According to Samantha, the advisor was,

Very easy to talk to and very helpful. She is understanding and knowledgeable and knows exactly what she is doing. She is very supportive and if I have any questions I can ring her.

The only difficulty was that the sessions had to be structured in work time,

It is difficult for me in terms of work schedules. Appointments with clients are made way ahead of time and because we are offering a public service we have to honour these. I have to see the advisor in my lunch break.

Samantha was doing much of the work at home but she was also going into the workplace at weekends and in the evenings to use the computer.

APL can be a very long route and because of restraints at work it is very difficult to do any APL during the normal working day. I don't think I would have gone down this route if it wasn't for the fact that my employers were paying.

Within her job, Samantha reported that she

would make potential APL candidates aware of the hard work and long hours involved,

I think I would advise people to look at other avenues because it is so drawn out. That is its main drawback. There seem to be easier routes in gaining qualifications.

However, she believed that for women who are coming back into the labour market it is a good way of gaining a qualification, particularly where formal training is at a distance or at times that conflict with domestic responsibilities.

Overall Samantha reported that the service she was receiving,

Was a very useful way of gaining a qualification that I would normally have had to go to college to do. If I wanted to change jobs in the future it would be a way of giving evidence of my abilities. It has given me more confidence as I have had to sit down and assess different parts of my job which has made me more aware of what I am doing. I would like to go on to do the NVQ in Business Administration level 3.

7.10 Lisa

This young woman with a small child has found that the APL route to an NVQ level 2 in Business Administration fits her domestic commitments exceptionally well. She had a very successful career history until being made redundant while on maternity leave. The evidence suggests that her employer's support of her via the project has triggered a very serious commitment to continuous personal

development. This is particularly noticeable in her very positive response to the opportunity despite a post which is far more junior than the one she had held before the birth of her child.

Lisa is 26 years old, has a young child and has lived all her life in a small town near Lowestoft. On leaving school, she went to college to gain a BTEC Diploma in Business Studies.

Lisa's first job as a sales assistant for a company in Lowestoft rapidly turned into responsibility for the whole of the sales department as the company made most its workforce redundant. She was formally promoted to commercial supervisor and remained for six years with a period of maternity leave in 1992. While on maternity leave, she was made redundant but very shortly after found work as a receptionist for a careers guidance agency in Lowestoft.

At her mid year appraisal in December 1993, Lisa's manager suggested that she work toward an NVQ in Business Administration at level 3. In March, her employer decided to use the support of the project and assistance from APLACS. Lisa's initial assessment by an APLACS advisor led to a level 2 commitment rather than the previous level 3 which she had been unable to complete. The external advisory support had been valuable, according to Lisa.

She reads my work through and comes up with new ideas that I have not thought of before. She is extremely helpful.

Lisa reported needing a lot of explanation about APL as this way of gaining a qualification was a totally new concept to her. When interviewed, she had almost completed three units but was finding the work very demanding. She had borrowed a computer from a neighbour for two weeks but had transferred to the computers in the office which she was using at weekends in order to get the work done. She was finding

this difficult while taking care of her young son. Nevertheless, she said that she felt APL was especially valuable for women at home with children,

APL suits me because I can do it when I have time. It is not structured like a college course which is actually very helpful with a small child. There are careers outside mothers' front doors waiting for them but the problem is they are probably not aware of what is available.

Lisa believes the NVQ will be useful and would recommend it to others,

It has widened my knowledge because I have had to sit and look at what I do. When I do the writing up I suddenly realise what I do every day and what I take for granted. I now realise how broad my job is. I feel that I am adding to my present career rather than changing it. It has given me confidence to start studying again.

Lisa hopes to go on to do NVQ level 3.

7.11 Laura

This young single parent of three small children was particularly enthusiastic about the specific attention to women. Without employer support through the project, she would not have known about NVQs nor about this route to qualifications which she perceives to be a key route to her serious commitment to a career in public sector administration. Her experience has made her a vociferous champion of both APL and NVQs. She is also acute in her assessment of the general

under-funding in training generally for support staff (primarily women) when compared to company investment in senior staff.

Her employer's contribution has been essential for her as most of her weekly earnings are committed to childminding costs.

Laura is in her mid twenties, has three children under the age of six and lives in King's Lynn. She spent her early life in Manchester but her family moved to Norfolk when she was eleven. Laura and her husband lost their home in 1993 and moved into a council house. The marriage subsequently broke down.

Laura does voluntary work on behalf of a trust for the homeless. She also acts as a counsellor, a linkworker, and a landlady. The linkwork involves helping people with budgeting, benefits and accommodation. She is currently working part-time as a receptionist for a careers guidance service.

She studied at an FE college on leaving school and there gained RSA qualifications in typing and shorthand. She also did an intensive secretarial course and A level English through distance learning. Through her voluntary work, Laura has acquired training in counselling, health and safety, and in dealing with aggressive behaviour.

Laura's first paid work was in the DSS in an administrative post. She began her current part time job as a receptionist for a King's Lynn careers guidance agency in 1992. She told researchers that she would like to remain in administrative work but wants to experience different work environments, particularly within the public sector. She would also like to build on her voluntary work experience and use her skills in a field like the probation service.

Laura first heard about APL when she began her current job,

I thought it was a way of getting a qualification that saved you a lot of study.

She began doing APL in April 1994 after "hounding" her boss about it. She was offered support for level 3 in Business Administration but is undertaking level 2 as she feels more comfortable with this given her skills and experience. She is, in fact, doing levels 1 and 2 together plus the shorthand and transcription units in order also to obtain a Certificate in Business Administration - Administration and Secretarial.

The agreement to do an NVQ through APL was made by her boss and she knew nothing about this particular project. She had never seen the Information Pack,

I just had to sign some forms for the APLACS advisor. I received my entitlement forms for four units and was worried as I thought it referred to four units of the NVQ when I needed 18!

When interviewed, Laura knew nothing about other services offered through the project. She was unaware of the costs of services and of the payment procedures. She expected her employer to pay since they invest very heavily in senior members of staff. As Laura put it,

The receptionists deserve something too. We have all these initiatives for women returners who visit the agency, so what about the staff?

She would also like to see more childcare provision. She works part time and spends a large proportion of her weekly earnings on childminding.

When interviewed, Laura was having sessions with her advisor at her work place and was working on her portfolio at home,

I try to do it at work but I never

have the time.

She was finding that APL is a combination of study and support. An issue for her was whether she could apply herself to do the work. She was still trying to get to grips with the process when interviewed but it was becoming easier as she became more familiar with the APL process. Laura reported being very happy with the service she was receiving,

I am extremely satisfied with the back up provided and the way it is explained. When I first saw what was needed it looked horrifically complicated but the advisor explained it to me in layman's language and broke it down into manageable bits. She is always available at the end of the phone, which is really nice. She is approachable, friendly and constructive in her criticism.

Laura thought it would be a good idea to have more information that publicises APL,

It should say how easy it is and how much support you get whilst doing it. It should be information that makes APL accessible to women, something that does not make them think they need a degree to do it.

She thought it good to have a project that is not male oriented,

It should have happened a long time ago. It does men good to have to sit on the sidelines for a while because they have always had everything in the work environment. I am not a feminist but women often get overlooked. It is often women who work in administration which is the backbone of any organisation. Organisations would collapse if it wasn't for

Since she has been working for the careers guidance agency, Laura has used the computer aided guidance,

I get a different answer every time. The Microdoors programme for women is very patronising - I would ban it!

She had never used other guidance or assessment services before.

Laura reported that she would definitely recommend the APL service to others,

Since I have been doing it myself I feel more confident about recommending it to clients. My manager put in my appraisal that my enthusiasm for APL is a joy to behold. I am much more confident about APL and NVQs and I can tell people that it is easy and that if I can do it so can they.

8 EMPLOYER CASE STUDIES

8.1 Overview

Twelve employers were directly involved in either actual or 'potential' support for their women staff through the project.

In all cases, women funded by employers were in broadly traditional female occupational areas (eg clerical/administration, school teaching, caring/childcare, hairdressing, public sector management and guidance). Where they were being supported to acquire NVQs through APL, these were in the following areas: Business Administration, Customer Care, MCI, or TDLB assessor awards.

Five employers requested services on behalf of their employees. Two of these, Norwich Union and the Preschool Playgroup Association, made their decisions after the budgeted allocation had been exhausted. Both requested that a case be put to the Employment Department for further subsidy.

A further five employers supported **women who initiated requests** that their organisations make the contributions on the women's behalf.

One further large employer who wished to offer the project's services to those women amongst its staff likely to be facing redundancy was precluded from doing so by the trade unions. The objection were based on the gender restriction.

Two of the region's guidance services purchased APL units of service support for their own staff. One made this decision very early in the project and the second much later. Neither was significantly involved in the delivery of services and both purchased units of service before the sudden peak in demand occurred in late July and early August. Neither of these employers is included as a full case study though samples of their staff appear in the individual case studies (Section 7 cases 7.7 through 7.11). One used the project primarily to support receptionists in gaining NVQs in Business

Administration. This provider was also prepared to support its women managers through MCI but the HRD manager was reluctant to 'privilege' female managers in this way.

The second provider is using the project support to directly assist its advisors. Some will be working towards TDLB assessor awards.

Five of the employers (all separate organisations), who supported staff as a consequence of women initiating the requests, refused to be interviewed. The managers involved in each case reported the organisation to be so large that the relevance of their agreement to support individual employees was not significant in terms of staff development policy as a whole. The implication was that this support was a "one-off".

Prior to the project receiving approval from the Employment Department, three large firms declaring redundancies across the region expressed firm interest in the project's services. Once approval came through from TEED, the Research Unit set up a meeting with RAN (the Redundancy Advice Network). It early became clear that the project would not benefit if it compromised RAN's gatekeeping position where redundancy advice services were concerned. Therefore, all further independent approaches to such companies were cancelled by research staff. This was right and proper within the tacit agreements between agencies across the region. It was also an important and necessary move as all the providers within the project were members of the RAN network (see 4.17).

The Research Unit consulted with RAN's co-ordinator on a regular basis and she, in turn, represented the projects' services to appropriate employers. However, given the short time scale of the project, it is difficult to assess whether RAN was able to fit the services into the network's existing framework of presentations to companies. Should RAN move to "whole workforce services", the project model would provide an effective tool.

Research staff found repeated evidence that the 'women only' nature of the project caused some problems for some providers and for some employers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the greater difficulties rested with about a third of the providers. This was confirmed in interviews with managers speaking for providers. The gender issue did seem to cause some providers concern. (All interviewees' views and their organisations remain confidential to research staff. Reports and quotations within this report are thus anonymous.)

Where employers were concerned, we found little direct evidence of objections to a "women-only" initiative. In most cases, the support was warmly welcomed because it helped managers where they were experiencing restrictions on staff development budgets. This was particularly the case where the project offered a way of justifying support to the peripheral workforce. Employers in this admittedly small sample nevertheless evidenced concern that their budgets were or could be seen to be privileging the core workforce.

The following three case studies indicate the project's appeal to employers. All but one within the limited sample sought APL. Norwich Union requested a wide range of services across the whole of the model.

7.1 A Norfolk High School

The High School is a grant maintained secondary school for 11-16 year olds (520 on roll) with 40 teachers and 20 support staff.

The school has a special training and development grant from the Department for Education. Most of the money is earmarked for teachers with a total INSET budget of £22,000, roughly £500/teacher. There is a strategy for staff development and the school is aiming for liP during 1994/95. *We are now beginning to consider the training needs of all our staff.* Through the project, the school funded its Head of the Upper School to undertake MCI Level 4 via APL (see case study of Anne, 7.2).

Within priorities set for 1994/95, Anne's APL was funded as part of a drive to increase staff qualifications. In interview the Deputy Head commented,

We are especially keen on this as a number of our teachers do not have a first degree. Anne is looking at things she is already doing. It's giving her a chance to stand back and evaluate her work and thus improve it. She has produced reports for us which have helped us provide liP evidence on what we are doing. For teachers to be learning is an advantage in itself. It helps them to empathise with the children as they go through the learning process.

The school feels that NVQs are going to be very important in the future. Some teachers are undertaking industrial placements from which they may be expected to produce a portfolio for NVQ assessment.

NVQs appeal because they are aligned with varying levels of qualification. They might also work very well with non teaching staff. The ideas that are coming through are very impressive. The management skills covered by the APL fit in with the needs of the school far more than I expected.

It is probable that the school will want to use the services of the project again. One priority since 1992 has been middle management training. Early use of a consultant was assessed as a waste of money but the response to APL has been very positive,

The teachers either want something that is linked to their skills and experience or they want to meet with other teachers.

The school's Deputy Head is the Chair of the Norfolk INSET Group for grant maintained schools and **she will be recommending the APL services within the model to other schools within the Group.**

She also said in interview that **she felt it was a good idea that the project was for women only,**

Three quarters of the staff in this school are men. Very few women are in senior management roles - in fact I am the only one. It is very important for women to get into these roles.

On the APL route to NVQs, the school noted that the best feature of the service was,

The linking of the units to the school's development needs - the practical application of the work. The school is getting a lot out of it as well as the individual.

7.2 An SME in the service industry

A hairdressing group with salons across the whole of East Anglia, including branches in Cambridge and Suffolk, contracted multiple units of subsidy to support 13 women employees for APL. The Group headquarters is located in Norwich. This medium sized organisation predominantly employs women in a traditionally female service industry. Its owner/manager and senior partners include men. One senior stylist is also a man as are a very small number of trainees. On the whole, this is a female workforce. The group has its own direct training facility and is at the prestige end of the market. It has been in operation for some thirty years.

The Group's Training Manager is using the project to train TDLB assessors for D32 and D33. This is an effective example of the potential within the model to support SMEs where commitment to training, to NVQs, and to LiP is high but where resources for whole

workforce investment in staff development have been marginally restricted by a slight downturn in business during the recent recession.

The Group has also been keen to provide training and staff development for its administrative and support staff but has found the full costs difficult to meet. All available training investment has been traditionally used to support staff in achieving NVQs in hairdressing. The project provided the Group with an opportunity to invest in women involved in support services in addition to the core prioritised skills needed by the business.

A particularly appropriate example of the value emerging from the model has been support for a part-time woman employee (stock room control) who is now undertaking units of an NVQ level 3 in Customer Care through APL. Assessment of her skills and experience by APLACS revealed that she had been under employed by the Group. The most recent interviews with the company suggest that her opportunities for career development within the organisation are increasing as are her motivation and her commitment to her employer. In interview, the Groups Training Officer commented,

I had been trying to find a way to justify investment in her training and career development to the Partners but, as she only works part-time in the stock room, she has been right 'at the bottom of the pile' whenever the training budget is reviewed. This project has been just what I needed to argue for company investment. Women in these invisible jobs always seem to miss out.

APLACS, the APL provider within the project, has arranged for its advisors to deliver support to employees on site within the salons across the region. This capacity for meeting employee/ employer APL needs across a wide geographical area is characteristic of the

invaluable commitment of APLACS to the value added features of the model.

8.4 Women in the child care sector: Case study of an unmet demand

Late in the project the needs of women in the childcare sector emerged. In excess of 150 women across the region who are currently self employed and working as childminders in playgroups and or as assistants in crèches need 'paper' qualifications. Most tend either to be sub-contracted by local authorities or paid by private families. These women do not, on the whole, have recognised national qualifications but will have undertaken the Pre-school Playgroup Association (PPA) foundation course which gives them an attendance certificate. This cohort is seeking NVQs in childcare through APL but, as part-time low paid workers, are not in a financial position to fund their qualification needs. Neither are they included in employer training budgets because they are generally self employed.

There is considerable pressure for childminders to obtain recognised qualifications due to European regulations now affecting all childcare workers and the Association has a very few (two or three) trained NVQ assessors currently in place. Childminders, however, are unable to afford the APL support assessment and verification costs without assistance. The Association had hoped that the project could offer financial support for APL to an initial cohort of those **childminders** who are marginally "better off" and thus able to share in the 30% contribution for APL.

Similar problems face **play group workers**. Though not all are self employed workers, their employers, nevertheless, tend to be small voluntary organisations with very limited budgets. This means that similar financial constraints are in operation where these women seek access to NVQs.

The Pre-School Playgroup Association provides a 200 hour training course for the Diploma in Playgroup Practice. It costs £250 - £300 or £80

if the woman is a member of the PPA.

However, the course only provides attendance certificates, not a nationally recognised qualification. Nevertheless, that training, combined with skills and experience, is sufficient for the NVQ levels 2 or 3 in Child Care and Education through APL. In Norfolk, no playgroup worker has yet been assessed for an NVQ because of the cost which can be as high as £1000. At present, therefore, women are gaining the training they need but not the recognised NVQ or equivalent qualification. There are 475 playgroups in Norfolk with an average of two staff each. These are dispersed across the region. In order to access NVQs either a cohort of assessors need to be trained or peripatetic assessors used. This latter option is more expensive. The cheapest current assessment route costs £45/NVQ unit plus £200 registration fee for each woman worker. The level 2 NVQ in Child Care and Education has 10 units and the level 3 NVQ has 13. Most playgroup workers earn around £10 a session and do three to five sessions a week, earning between £30 - £50 a week.

Each playgroup is autonomous. Most are charities with a constitution and management committee made up largely of parents. A management committee has responsibility for paying workers. Parents often help out in the playgroup in order to keep the cost for users down. There is a considerable concern that the training for playgroup workers is not at present sufficiently rigorous. Many workers are mature women with children of their own who have completed only the PPA training. Though their skills and experience may be good, they need recognised qualifications. The PPA has long argued for its own training programmes to be recognised for NVQ accreditation with its own initial assessors. However, this has not been feasible in Norfolk for a range of reasons, not least because of the widely dispersed occupational workforce.

As with the childminders, some of the playgroup workers wished to use the project. The PPA itself indicated that it was prepared to offer some additional financial assistance for APL to child

care workers as contribution within the project. This client need did not emerge until late July after the project subsidy allocation had been exhausted.

This case study of potential clients of the project is important because it has revealed a significant core of women workers in a traditionally low-paid but expanding occupational area who need financial support to achieve NVQs. This numerically large group is likely to be replicated across the country.

In terms of NETTS, these are precisely the kinds of adults whose learning needs require subsidy. Individual commitment in this occupational sector is not a problem but translation into workforce upskilling to meet national targets is blocked by financial barriers. It is, at the same time, important to distinguish these practitioners from childcare managers.

For example, the project was able to assist one woman in the childcare sector who approached the project on her own initiative. She manages a shoppers' crèche in Norwich city centre and she purchased nine units of APL for MCI level 4. Though she told the research team that the funding was not easy out of her resources, she felt the commitment was important. As was the case for some of the other women using the project service, her commitment to APL prompted her employer (a Cambridge Childcare Group) to contribute £100 towards the costs. She was one of four women who shared the costs of APL with their employers.

DETAILS OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

The Access Centre, City College Norwich

The role of the Access Centre at City College Norwich has been to act as an initial contact point for enquiries referring clients on to appropriate service providers. Its own traditional guidance services are provided free to the public and to students of the College.

The Access Centre offered to act as an **initial contact point** for people interested in the project. Its telephone number was included in the press releases and other media coverage. It also provided **initial impartial guidance**.

The Accreditation of Prior Learning Advice and Consultancy Service (APLACS)

APLACS provided a service to help women using the project to obtain units towards National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) through the formal recognition of their existing skills and experience - the accreditation of prior learning or APL.

It was set up in September 1992 to develop and deliver APL services as part of an Employment Department project to introduce NVQs to employers, training providers and the public through the Access to Assessment Initiative. APLACS has also been involved in a project to recognise the unpaid work skills of women - the 'Skills Recognised' workshops. This initiative was partly funded by the European Social Fund and has been seen as a very significant development in the recognition of women's transferable competencies. APLACS is a voluntary organisation with funding from Norfolk & Waveney TEC. It is managed by WEETU (see below). APLACS works with a wide range of both men and women and its advisers are familiar with all the mainstream NVQs.

As part of the project, APLACS has been providing **APL services** across the full range of

Career Development Centres (CDCs Norfolk & Waveney TEC)

The Career Development Centres (CDCs) established by Norfolk and Waveney TEC in May 1992 operate as shop front career advice centres and are based in Norwich, Kings Lynn, Thetford, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

The CDCs are the first high street guidance centres designed to meet the needs of all adults across Norfolk and Waveney. They were established to work in partnership with the Employment Service, Norfolk Careers Service, Suffolk Careers Advisory Service and other guidance agencies in the region.

Up to one hour of initial guidance is traditionally provided free of charge. A range of more in-depth guidance services are also provided with charges ranging from £15 for the preparation of a curriculum vitae to over £300 for its Redundancy Counselling Service. Qualified staff also administer psychometric tests for charge.

The CDCs have entered into voluntary partnership management agreements with both Norfolk Careers Service and Suffolk Careers Advisory Service. This pattern has been a preliminary arrangement prior to the bidding procedure for external tendering of Careers Services.

As part of the project, the Career Development Centres offered **personal guidance** and **psychometric tests** (Saville & Holdsworth) in Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn, Thetford and Lowestoft.

The Information Centre, Lowestoft College

The Information Centre at Lowestoft College has also offered individual guidance and advice within the project. The aim of the Information Service is traditionally to ensure that people are provided with guidance that helps them

identify the programmes of learning that meet their needs.

The Information Centre joined the project in order to act as an **initial contact point** and to provide initial guidance for people in the Waveney area (ie, in Suffolk). As part of the project, however, Lowestoft College also offered to provide **personal guidance, ongoing personal guidance, group guidance** and a range of **APL services** within the model. The purpose here has been to ensure delivery to the southern part of the Norfolk and Waveney area.

Norfolk Careers Service

Norfolk Careers Service has traditionally offered statutory careers guidance to young people. Since September 1992, Norfolk Careers Service has also offered an education, training and employment guidance service to people of all ages, particularly targeting those in the rural areas of Norfolk.

A network of offices across the country provide drop in services, careers libraries, and job vacancy information. There are area offices in Norwich, King's Lynn, Great Yarmouth, Thetford, Dereham and North Walsham. They administer sub offices, which are open less frequently, in over a dozen smaller towns. The service also acts as a recruitment agency for employers.

As part of the project, Norfolk Careers Service offered to provide **personal guidance, group guidance** and **psychometric tests** (Morrisby tests) in rural areas of Norfolk.

The Redundancy Advice Network (RAN)

RAN became involved in the project as an administrative partner and a case study appears in the main report at 4.17. The organisation was established in 1990 as a network of providers and assists employers and their workers in Norfolk & Waveney where people are being made redundant. It provides information and advice on eligibility for benefits, careers

guidance, job search skills, training, retraining and other needs arising from redundancy. The network has some 20 members who provide services. Most of the guidance agencies involved in the pilot project are members of the network.

From the outset, the Research Unit worked with RAN to ensure that this pilot did not cut across RAN's work. RAN has been very supportive of the project and has assisted in promoting it.

The School of Management, Finance and Education, City College Norwich

As part of the project, the Head of this School (from September 1994, re-established as the College's Management Centre) offered a wide range of psychometric tests for individual women in the Norwich policy area. Because he could offer clients a battery of several tests, some women selected his service even though they were resident in other parts of the region.

Women's Employment, Enterprise and Training Unit (WEETU)

WEETU is a voluntary organisation which was established in 1988. It offers educational, training and employment guidance predominantly for women. Individual guidance is mainly provided through drop in facilities in Norwich and occasionally in King's Lynn and Cromer.

As well as individual guidance, WEETU has pioneered the use of group guidance for women in the region. Since 1990 it has run over 20 of these programmes. It is also a research and campaigning organisation and is involved in the national debate on women's employment and training, including APL for unwaged work and for skills and experience gained within the home. Most of WEETU's services are provided free of charge at the point of delivery.

As part of the project, WEETU offered **initial guidance, personal guidance, ongoing personal guidance** and **group guidance** in the Norwich policy area and in other selected

locations. In conjunction with the Open University, it also provided support for study of the **Open University Personal and Career Development Pack**. In conjunction with the Norwich and District Voluntary Services, it offered opportunities for **employee volunteering**. Demand for this latter service emerged after the close of the project.



**WORK AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES FOR WOMEN**

This entitles

.....
to the following service.....

provided by

VALUE 1 UNIT

Payment of £30

received with thanks

Signed

Name

Please hand this in to the agency providing the above service.

THIS IS VALID UNTIL 31ST JULY 1994

GUIDANCE & ASSESSMENT SERVICES - TEED PROJECT

WHO IS OFFERING WHAT?

SERVICES	PROVIDERS
One-to-One Guidance	- WEETU (Norwich policy area) - Norfolk Careers Service (in rural areas) - CDCs (Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn, Lowestoft & Thetford) - Lowestoft College
Ongoing Guidance	- WEETU - Lowestoft College
Computer Aided Guidance (Offered only as part of another service)	- Access Centre - WEETU - CDCs - Norfolk Careers Service - Lowestoft College
Group Guidance	- WEETU - Norfolk Careers Service (in rural areas) - Lowestoft College
Personality & Aptitude Tests	- School of Management, Finance and Education, City College Norwich (in Norwich Policy Area), - CDCs (Saville & Holdsworth aptitude test in groups of 4-6 women, four locations) - Norfolk Careers Service (rural locations, Morrisby psychometric tests in groups of 4-6 women)
Open University Personal and Career Development Pack	- WEETU & The Open University
Accreditation of Prior Learning, 1,2,3,4	- APLACS - Lowestoft College
Employee Volunteering	- WEETU & NDVS (Norwich and District Voluntary Services)
Job Exchange Job Shadowing Links with Women Managers Individual Mentors Monitored Work Placement	Not currently available as a separate service within the timescale Would follow on from one-to-one guidance

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